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Letters

Bats Maligned...

Athens, Ohio
How ironic and sad that in an article on "The New Right-Wing Smear Machine" [Nov. 12] as well as on your cover, you use the innocent, maligned bat to suggest creepy evil. It goes to show that even the most well-intentioned sometimes inadvertently make use of coded, emotionally charged stereotypes, considered culturally acceptable until we are alerted to their insidious nature. I think you owe it to bats and to the balance of nature dependent on their voracious insectivorous behavior (at least for the species you depict) to issue an apology.
Heather Berman Cantino

The Design Team Replies

New York City
We never intended to smear the humble bat any more than we would have maligned pumpkins had we put a jack-o'-lantern on our Halloween-inspired cover instead. Nevertheless, we apologize to all bats whose feelings were hurt by our depiction of them.
Stephen Kling
Avenging Angels

...Pandas Bamboo-zled...

Ames, Iowa
Frank W. Lewis errs in Puzzle No. 3103 [Nov. 19]. The clue for 27 Down mentions eating eucalyptus, and the answer is "panda." Wrong. Pandas eat bamboo. Koalas eat eucalyptus. Very upsetting.
Deborah Fink

...& Duckies Poisoned

New York City
Mark Schapiro's "Toxic Toys" [Nov. 5] did a terrific job of laying out the dangers of phthalates in children's toys. More than 90 percent of all phthalates are used to soften PVC plastic, the worst plastic from a health perspective. If we're going to talk about toxic toys, we must examine the plastic used to make those toys, which causes health and environmental problems from production to disposal.

Highly toxic chemicals, including dioxins and furans, vinyl chloride, lead, mercury and phthalates, are used or released in the PVC life cycle. Studies have documented links between PVC and the increased likelihood of developing diseases, including a rare form of liver cancer. PVC is chlorine-based, making it a major dioxin source during production and especially in disposal. A highly toxic group of chemicals that build up in the food chain and in our bodies, they can cause cancer and harm the immune and reproductive systems. Dioxins are so toxic they have been targeted for a global phaseout by an international treaty. That's why Wal-Mart, Microsoft, Nike, Apple and others are phasing out this poison plastic.

Sure, getting the phthalates out of toys is critically important, but it's essential that we also address the life-cycle toxicity of the "rubber" duckies and other toys our kids are playing with.
Michael Schade
Center for Health, Environment and Justice
www.pvcfree.org

College Station, Tex.
Mark Schapiro is right on target in writing that toys in the United States are more dangerous than toys in Europe and that phthalates are poisonous to the human nervous system and a threat to sexual development in children. He is also correct in reporting the lack of action by the EPA in limiting exposure to phthalates. The EPA keeps saying it can't act because it doesn't know why phthalates and related poisons are dangerous. Nonsense! Fifty years ago we learned that the same or very similar effects were produced by exposure to DDT and other chlorinated insecticides. As for sperm counts, this too has been known all this time.

Research in Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands has clearly shown that dioxins like those in Agent Orange and PCBs poison transthyretin, the carrier protein for

letters@thenation.com

(continued on page 22)

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The Nation.
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Crisis as Opportunity

The skies are darkening, and ominous new considerations are intruding on the politics of 2008. The softening economy, accumulating foreclosures for homeowners, more multibillion-dollar write-offs by major banks, the swooning dollar and stock market, oil prices approaching $100 a barrel—the list goes on, inviting a trendy cliché: the "perfect storm" stalking American prosperity. The Federal Reserve chair will never predict recession—it would be self-fulfilling if he did. But Ben Bernanke came close when he acknowledged to Congress that things are going to get worse before they get better.

EDITORIAL

Most Americans are ill prepared for a catastrophic reckoning. Everything else aside, the basic fact of our national condition is indebtedness. That means when jobs disappear and wages slump further, the struggle to keep up with the mortgage or rent will intensify for a broad swath of the population. The pain this time will not be confined to a few laid-off "losers."

Presidential candidates have not had much to say about these gloomy realities, but they soon will. A down economy adds another heavy blow to Republican prospects but also presents a challenge for Democrats. The incumbent party takes a serious hit if an election-year recession develops (ask Jimmy Carter, in 1980, or George H.W. Bush, in 1992). But that bad news might encourage Democrats to be even more cautious than they already are. Voters will want to know of a potential President, first, whether he or she grasps what is upon us and, second, what he or she intends to do about it if elected.

What should the candidates be calling for? The first imperative should be short-term measures to salve the pain of those who have lost homes or are drowning in debt. It's good politics, of course, but also an essential first step toward restoring a healthy and equitable economy—healthy *because* it is more equitable. Representative Bradley Miller has introduced a bill that would allow bankruptcy judges to ease homeowners' mortgage terms, but it's running into the usual big-money opposition—from both parties. For the longer term, government can enforce tightened mortgage regulation, which has fallen into disuse (Miller, Barney Frank and many others are co-sponsoring a good start). This kind of assistance is not unlike what government does for major corporations and banking institutions when they get into similar trouble. Meanwhile, financial firms should be disciplined—if not indicted—for the reckless behavior that led to the crisis.

Economic stimulus requires the government to get the money moving again in a stalled private sector, pumping up jobs, wages and benefits with emergency spending—and, yes, temporarily larger federal deficits. Taxing wealth and reviving the right to organize unions will start to redress the gross inequalities. The housing industry is not coming back to life anytime soon, but through public works programs we can repair our crumbling national infrastructure. We can restart public employment programs for displaced industrial workers and harder-to-employ inner-city youth. We can send working people back to school with financial aid aimed at community college students.

The point is, the coming storm, whatever its dimensions, is a great opportunity to begin restoring the role of responsive, effective government. The Republicans clearly don't get it. But it's not clear the Democrats do either, or that they have the nerve to embrace the possibilities. Voters should push them to speak to this moment. And then judge them accordingly.

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STUDENT NATION

'Islamo-facism' on campus

NATION POLL

Who is the GOP's most likely presidential candidate?

AROUND THE NATION

Post your local events on our calendar

Justice Delayed

On October 29 the Bush Administration abandoned a two-decade effort to deport two Palestinian immigrants, Khader Hamide and Michel Shehadeh. Longtime readers may recognize Hamide and Shehadeh as two of the "LA 8," a group of college-age students and activists arrested in predawn raids in Los Angeles in January 1987 and placed in deportation proceedings for their alleged ties to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), at the time the second-largest faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization. I have been representing the LA 8 pro bono and writing about their struggle for *The Nation* ever since. This, I'm happy to say, will be my last piece about this case.

COMMENT

Hamide and Shehadeh's deportation case, which the *Washington Post* termed the *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* of immigration law, dates back so far that the initial charges were for communist affiliation. When it began, Ronald Reagan was President, the Berlin Wall was still standing and we were arming Osama bin Laden in his battle against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Shortly after the LA 8 were arrested, William Webster, then head of the FBI, admitted that the men had committed no crimes and that if they were US citizens there would be no basis for their arrest. But at the FBI's behest, immigration authorities charged them with distributing PFLP magazines, hosting annual community dinners that celebrated the PFLP and raising money for humanitarian aid organizations in Palestine.

In 1989 Federal Judge Stephen Wilson declared the initial charges unconstitutional, in a decision establishing that immigrants living here enjoy the same First Amendment rights as citizens. However, when Congress repealed the McCarran-Walter Act, upon which the initial charges had been based, immigration authorities simply charged Hamide and Shehadeh under a new provision making material support of terrorist organizations a deportable offense. This immigration law, enacted in 1990, was the precursor to the 1996 criminal material support statute that has been so widely used by the Bush Administration since 9/11.

In 1994 Judge Wilson halted the case on selective prosecution grounds, finding that the government had singled out Hamide and Shehadeh for their constitutionally protected political associations while not seeking to deport similarly situated immigrants who had aided the Nicaraguan *contras* or the Afghan mujahedeen. The government responded by getting Congress to strip the federal courts of jurisdiction over selective prosecution claims in immigration cases. In 1999 the Supreme Court upheld that court-stripping statute.

In 2003 the government again amended its case, charging Hamide and Shehadeh with being deportable under the Patriot Act for their conduct almost two decades earlier. In 2005, when the Real ID Act expanded grounds for deportation still further, the government amended the charges yet again. The longer the case dragged on, it seemed, the worse the law became.

However, in January immigration judge Bruce Einhorn, in one of his last acts before he left the bench, dismissed the case for prosecutorial misconduct. The government initially appealed but eventually agreed to dismiss all charges. The other

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six, meanwhile, all of whom were here on temporary visas when the case began, have either gained permanent residency or have applications pending. One has become a citizen.

The Bush Administration deserves credit for its willingness to drop the case. It's never easy to abandon a case labeled "terrorism." There were many occasions when the Clinton Administration, for example, could have abandoned the case, but always it decided to press ahead. Why was the Bush Administration able to do what Presidents Reagan, Bush Senior and Clinton could not? In some sense, it was the Nixon in China phenomenon. No one can accuse the Bush Administration of being "soft on terror" (ineffectual, counterproductive, human rights compromising, power-grabbing and immoral, yes—but not soft).

Perhaps more significant, this is one case where 9/11 did indeed change everything. All of a sudden, the United States recognized that it faced a threat from *real* terrorists, and magazine distributors no longer seemed such a grave concern. While immigration officials had been wasting hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to deport these erstwhile activists, they had allowed nineteen Al Qaeda terrorists to enter the country (and had even extended two of the hijackers' visas months after they had committed suicide in the 9/11 attacks).

But has the Administration really learned its lesson? The case against Hamide and Shehadeh prefigured many of the tactics widely and aggressively employed since 9/11, including reliance on guilt by association and sweeping charges of "material support"; the targeting of immigrants, backed by arguments that they don't deserve the same basic human rights as citizens; and the use of secret evidence. It took the government twenty-one years to recognize that such tactics were a mistake in Hamide and Shehadeh's case. How long before the government recognizes that it is making the same mistakes today? DAVID COLE

David Cole, The Nation's *legal affairs correspondent, was co-counsel for Hamide and Shehadeh on behalf of the Center for Constitutional Rights, along with lawyers from the ACLU and the National Lawyers Guild. His latest book (with Jules Lobel) is* Less Safe, Less Free: Why America Is Losing the War on Terror.

Carter Speaks His Mind

Since the publication of his 2006 book, *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*, Jimmy Carter has courted the sort of controversy that most ex-Presidents, and all would-be Presidents, avoid. Jonathan Demme's exceptional new documentary, *Jimmy Carter Man From Plains*, highlights that controversy, providing an intimate portrait of a man on a mission. *The Nation*'s John Nichols spoke with Carter about the book, the film and the 2008 presidential campaign.

Q: ***There is an intensity to this documentary that is not usually associated with someone a quarter-century out of the White House.***

A: This was my twenty-fourth book, and I've been on book tours on just about all of them. This is the first time that there

Noted.

SITUATION COMEDY: **Norman Lear**, who transformed the way American television addresses political issues, didn't really have time to think when asked at a writers' strike event what his most famous character, **Archie Bunker**, would say to the studios. Lear was at the event to support Writers Guild of America members seeking fair compensation for DVD and new-media sales and distribution. Excessive talk of royalties could easily have driven *All in the Family*'s most contrary character bonkers. But still Lear managed to intone, "You're killing my *Dancing With the Stars*" in a complete Bunker growl.

Unfortunately, Lear's ingenuity failed to rub off on the Fox television reporter who interviewed him next. Covering an event in which 4,000 WGA members and supporters espoused the need to respect writers for their material, the reporter didn't see the irony in essentially copying the same question or the dilution of its meaning, asking Lear with a straight face, "What would the Jeffersons say?" TIBBY ROTHMAN

SEXUAL SIDE EFFECTS: A recent study by University of Virginia researchers found that teens who lose their virginity early are *less likely* to end up delinquent than their abstaining peers—contrary to popular opinion and abstinence-only boosters. Tell that to Democrats who on November 1 approved a $28 million increase for Bush's abstinence-until-marriage programs.

POWER OF ATTORNEYS: On November 13, hundreds of dark-suited lawyers rallied on the steps of the New York County courthouse in a show of support for their beleaguered Pakistani colleagues. Thousands of Pakistani lawyers have taken to the streets (and been arrested) since Gen. **Pervez Musharraf** imposed a state of emergency on November 3. Reports indicate that many are being held in solitary confinement and even tortured. **Ali Ahsan**, a New York attorney and son of **Aitzaz Ahsan**, president of the Pakistan Supreme Court Bar Association, who was arrested in Islamabad, was one of he speakers. "US Congressmen have more influence in Pakistan than my father or other Pakistani intellectuals," said Ahsan. "We must mobilize. Call Congressmen. E-mail senators. The international community has to put the Pakistani government on notice—we are watching." It took the suspension of the Constitution and the removal of the courageous Chief Justice **Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry** to get Pakistani lawyers protesting, when once they had "bent their knees before military rulers," as Ahsan put it. What will it take for American lawyers to follow their lead, to protest their own government's tampering with the Constitution? JAYATI VORA

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has been that degree of intensity and drama and unpredictability—almost an urgency. I wanted to meet as many critics as I could and…it turned out to be quite a remarkable journey.

Q: ***Early in the documentary, you refer to US media coverage of the Middle East as "abominable" and entirely lacking in objectivity. Did you see yourself as doing battle with the media on the book tour?***
A: I was presenting a point of view that the American media rarely have a chance to cover. It would be almost inconceivable for any member of the House or Senate, Republican or Democrat, or any person campaigning for President, Republican or Democrat, to make the statements that I've made concerning the plight of the Palestinians or Israel withdrawing to its 1967 borders with modifications, or things of that kind. So this was a new opportunity for them to cover the Mideast issue from a completely—I'd say almost unprecedented—perspective.

Q: ***Do you think you moved the political debate forward?***
A: Oh, no. It would be amazing for me to hear any candidate for President even mention it—even begin to address these issues in a serious way.

Q: ***It is accepted today that a former President may, if he is willing to take some hits, say bold things about the Middle East but that candidates for President can't. Isn't that our crisis?***
A: That was one of the reasons I wrote the book—and it is the reason I continue to talk about these issues. I saw a complete dearth of any sort of substantive debate. For six years, now seven years, there hasn't been a single day of substantive negotiations between Israel and either Syria or the Palestinians. I wanted to precipitate some movement on the peace process and also bring the issue to the forefront. In other countries, by the way—I've been to Ireland and England and other countries in Europe lately—there is a pretty intense debate. But over here, zero.

Q: ***Obviously, this is a continuing project for you, initially with the book and now the documentary. As we come into the 2008 presidential election, is there any way that this issue can be made a part of the discussion?***
A: I don't think it's possible for candidates to talk about it. But it may be that some of the facts and some of the issues will sink into the consciousness of whoever is going to be in the White House beginning in 2009, and that they will see some responsibility and some way, some path toward a peace process. As you know, it is not generally expected that they will do this in the first year or two of their administration. President Clinton did not do it until his last year in office, and President Bush now is saying that he is going to try and do something. I'm not bragging about myself, but I started in the first two months of my administration. We finished it the second year I was in office. It is possible to achieve progress, if you start early enough and make it clear that peace is a priority of the administration.

Q: ***You entered the national political consciousness as "the man from Plains," the peanut farmer with few ties to Washington mounting an outsider campaign. Could you—same background, same scenario—run successfully for President today?***
A: No. It wouldn't be possible. In the first place, in 1975 and '76, I didn't have any money. We ran a campaign with my family, basically. We had seven of us every day campaigning in different places. We didn't even have enough money to stay in a hotel or motel. Then, President Ford and I both in the general election just ran on the $1-per-person checkoff. We didn't receive any contributions for the general election. That technique, that situation, is completely passé now.

Q: ***Did winning the presidency as an outsider free you to try new approaches in the Middle East?***
A: Definitely. There were two things: I didn't owe anybody anything when I got in office, so I could speak freely. I could act freely. The other part was that I didn't worry so much about the question, What do you do when you get in office to be re-elected? And I have to say that I neglected that part of my political career.

Q: ***You didn't calculate carefully enough.***
A: No. I really thought the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt would be enough to solidify my political support. But there are so many nuances of that issue that it didn't work out that way. Israel and Egypt remain at peace, however. There is consolation in that and I hope a good message to the next President. It is possible for an American President to advance the peace process, to achieve meaningful progress. It is also necessary—more necessary now than it has ever been.

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Pat Robertson, Protector of Traditional Family Values, Endorses Rudy Giuliani, a Serial Adulterer Who's Pro-Choice and Does Not Think That People Tolerant of Gays Should Be Destroyed by Hurricanes or Other Natural Disasters

Do politics mandate strange bedfellows? Sure.
So Pat's for a person whose views he'd disparage.
Yes, politics mandate strange bedfellows—sure.
However, where Rudy's concerned, so does
marriage.

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Is it sound policy to jail expectant mothers for substance abuse and take away their babies?

"Many professional health care and child welfare organizations have banded together against criminalization on the basis that it is antithetical to the best interests of both the mother and the child."

"… criminalization has no proven effect on improving infant health or deterring substance abuse by pregnant women."

"In fact, criminalization may deter the pregnant woman from seeking out necessary prenatal care for fear of losing their children or being arrested."

"A drug-exposed infant should be removed from the custody of his/her parent(s) only if the parent(s) are unable to protect and care for the infant and either support services are not sufficient to manage this risk, or the parent(s) have refused such services."*

If removal is good policy, shouldn't we also place infants in foster care if the mother smokes, imbibes or is obese? We could build orphanages as well as prisons!

Common Sense for Drug Policy
www.CommonSenseDrugPolicy.org www.DrugWarFacts.org
www.ManagingChronicPain.org www.MedicalMJ.org
www.TreatingDrugAddiction.org
info@csdp.org

* *Substance Use During Pregnancy: Time for Policy to Catch Up with Research*, by Barry M. Lester, PhD, Lynne Andreozzi, and Lindsey Appiah, published April 20, 2004. www.harmreductionjournal.com/content/1/1/5

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Norman Mailer

He went off to war and came home with a brief taste of combat to write the Great American War Novel. That's what ambitious young writers of his generation were supposed to do. *The Naked and the Dead* was so lavishly praised that, he said, he lost his sense of who he was, as a writer and as a man. The novels that followed were dissed by the critics, so he turned to autobiography, essays and journalism, letting his wild-man side strut and blow on the public stage. He excoriated fear within himself but as a writer showed steadfast courage.

EDITORIAL

Like a lot of novelists he contained many selves, starting with the nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn he destroyed. His life became his art and vice versa. For younger writers who came after him, that was a tough act to follow, especially when his life seemed a litany of *New York Post* headlines like Mailer Stabs Wife! and Norm Bites Ear!

But if, as his detractors said, he was only a self-promoting public delinquent, how could he have written thirty-some books, directed movies, run for mayor of New York, co-founded the *Village Voice*, written thoughtful essays? Could it be that Mailer was also a consummate workman, a serious artist, though pressured at times into hackdom to keep up alimony payments?

Because of his penchant for ironic, self-scouring confessions in works like *Advertisements for Myself* and *The Armies of the Night*, his epic Pulitzer Prize–winning account of the 1967 March on the Pentagon, we always knew Mailer, even if we didn't know him personally. He was an active presence in our lives—sometimes a pretentious, mouthy one, like the guy on the next bar stool, but more often a challenging thinker, acting out dramas of self, engaging with our times, using his life and his art to challenge our self-satisfaction.

Politics and history always preoccupied him. He took the measure of Presidents, starting with Jack Kennedy, whom he magnified into an existential hero. He focused on the evil of LBJ's and Nixon's Vietnam War. He treated George W. Bush with paternal contempt in *The New York Review of Books*:

> What is to be said of a man who spent two years in the Air Force of the National Guard (as a way of not having to go to Vietnam) and proceeded—like so many another spoiled and wealthy father's son—not to bother to show up for duty in his second year of service! Most of us have episodes in our youth that can cause us shame on reflection. It is a mark of maturation that we do not try to profit from our early lacks and vices but do our best to learn from them.

Yet Mailer called himself a "left conservative," perhaps because Tough Guys Don't Dance with anybody. When he was president of PEN, the writers' organization, he took a drubbing from the contemporary left (with *Nation* literary editor Elizabeth Pochoda leading the charge). Without consulting PEN's executive board, Mailer had invited Reagan's Secretary of State, George Shultz, to address a PEN congress.

Theologically he might be called a believing existentialist. Rejecting Sartre's atheism, he wrote in the June 6, 2005, *Nation*:

> Base our beliefs…on the fact of our existence, and it takes no great step for us to assume that we are not only individuals but may well be a vital part of a larger phenomenon that searches for some finer vision of life that could conceivably emerge from our present human condition.

Ave atque vale, Aquarius.

Comix Nation

by SELÇUK DEMIREL

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Alexander Cockburn

In Transports of Horror and Delight

London/Paris

It's most definitely not worth flying into Heathrow anymore. It always was a grim place, the trip thither or thence enhanced—this was many years ago—only by the beautiful Deco Firestone factory on the north side of the road. Then some swine bought the Firestone building and knocked it down overnight before the preservationists could muster and resist. The crawl down the A4 now lacks all allure, and the airport itself gets progressively uglier as the years roll by. In recent years the "war on terror" was blended in with innate British petty-minded obstructionism, culminating in the "one-bag rule," which has now entered the history books as a classic illustration of the incidental consequences of political ambition.

In August 2006 British Home Secretary John Reid, an ex-Communist Scottish bully of low mental caliber, disclosed a plot by Islamo-fascist chemists (home-brew division) to take liquids onto planes, blend them in the lavatory and then consign all on board to a fiery doom. The British press praised Reid's fearless mien and expressions of resolve to battle Terror whatever the cost, and he was touted as a possible successor to Tony Blair. Reid decided to keep his name on the front pages by banning all carry-on bags at Heathrow, thus instantly paralyzing the busiest airport in Europe.

After a while the rule was somewhat relaxed. Transit passengers were told that they were allowed to carry *one* bag, roughly the size of a laptop case, through Heathrow. So the walk-in closets that passengers routinely drag onto planes had to be loaded into the belly of the plane along with the pet cages and stowaways at point of origin, and Heathrow remained paralyzed.

Landing at De Gaulle airport north of Paris, though, is pleasant. You take a commuter train to the center of town, and then the Métro, in my case to the Arts et Métiers station in the Marais, from where I trundled my bag to the Rue du Temple, handy for the Jewish Museum, the rehabbed Musée de la Chasse, several score small jewelry manufactories now run by the Chinese and the National Archives. There were a couple of Velib' stands along the street, where you can rent a bicycle with a credit card, peddle around and lock it back in a stall at any other stand in Paris, assuming there's an empty one available. These are nice bikes: not complicated by the eighteen gears that now destroy all pleasure on bikes in the States, but the traditional three. The saddle is not the odious knife edge but a comfortable pad. The bell works and so do the lights fore and aft. On some there is even a basket.

There are some 180,000 Velib's available in Paris, and transport strikes lately mean they have been in constant demand. Indeed, some Parisians are creeping down in the late evening and putting their own private chains on Velib's to be sure of having one available in the morning, thus privatizing a public asset. Why the strikes? President Sarkozy is set on destroying the French social welfare system, starting with the years you have to work to get a full pension, an increasingly unfamiliar concept to most in America, enjoying as they do lives of entrepreneurial vigor uncompromised by effete notions of enjoyment and ease in the sunset years.

If Sarkozy fails, then the French Socialist Party stands ready to take up the task of liberating the French from their pleasant lives. The leaders of this party are all reading Bernard-Henri Lévy's latest bestselling package of nonsense, *Ce grand cadavre à la renverse* (literally, "this big corpse lying on its back"), in which the silk-shirted millionaire (big bundle inherited from timber baron dad) says (a) the left is incurably anti-Semitic and (b) should stop being left, thus presumably purging itself of anti-Semitism in the cleansing medium of capitalist greed. After all, anti-Semitism is, as August Bebel said, the socialism of fools. Why not go the whole hog and give up both? Serge Halimi, who has a savage review of the book in the November issue of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, of which he is one of the chief editors, tells me that BHL's counsels are being taken extremely seriously by the Socialist Party's elites.

Foul of purpose though he may be, Sarkozy has something lively about him. It's the same as with that other son of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Arnold Schwarzenegger. They have the inestimable talent of not being doleful. They enjoy being politicians and communicate this pleasure in a way that makes people sit up and pay attention. Sarkozy should recall that Austria-Hungary introduced, in 1854, the first compulsory social insurance law for miners, covering those beleaguered by sickness, old age or spousal loss. The system was expanded to the general population and again made compulsory in 1887, and Bismarck denounced it as socialism.

I headed for London for the weekend, and as the flat plains of northern France flashed by the train window I read Perry Anderson's 13,000-word judgment in *The London Review of Books* on the political and economic career of the European Union. There was a time, many years ago, when some—I was among them—argued for Britain to join the EU on the grounds that it might be the catalyst for radical transformation of sclerotic Albion. Others held that in the not-so-long run the EU would submit all Europeans to the diktats of bankers and bureaucrats, extirpating democracy along with sovereignty. The latter view, Anderson conclusively demonstrates, was the correct assessment.

Sobered by Anderson's savage reprise on Europe's complicity in the renditions and kidnappings demanded by the American empire, I stepped from the train in Waterloo and headed into the Battle of Ideas, among them, "Recycling is a waste of time." Just saying that in public these days can get you into a lot of trouble, as I will relate in my next dispatch. ■

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Katha Pollitt

The Atheist's Dilemma

How likely is it that the world's 1.3 billion Muslims will wake up one morning and abandon their ancestral faith? Even if you are a ferocious Sam Harris–style atheist who thinks religion is completely stupid—the province of shysters and fools—you have to admit it would be quite astonishing if that view persuaded the devout anytime soon: *This Koran, which I thought was dictated to the Prophet by an angel, is totally ridiculous and poorly written to boot! Muhammad, that child molester, most definitely did not fly to heaven and back on a winged horse! What an idiot I was to give these notions a moment's credibility!* There's no question in my mind that horror at militant Islam and fear of Muslim immigration lie behind at least some of the current vogue for atheism—you don't make the bestseller list by excoriating the evils of Lutheranism or Buddhism. The problem is that the more scorn one feels for religious belief, the less able one is to appreciate "reformed" or "moderate" variants of the faith. After all, pro-gay Episcopalians and liberation theology Catholics still believe in Christ, the afterlife, sin; reformed Jews still find wisdom in the Old Testament. Strictly speaking, an atheist should have no truck with any of it. But if all you can offer people is reasons to quit their religion—which also often means their community, their family, their support system and their identity—you're not going to have many takers. For every brilliant angry teenager you strengthen in doubt, there's a mosque- or churchful of people who'll choose the old-time religion if the only other choice is nothing.

I'm presuming that this is what Ian Buruma was getting at when he called Somali-Dutch activist and polemicist Ayaan Hirsi Ali an "Enlightenment fundamentalist": once a devout Muslim, now an atheist and feminist firebrand, Hirsi Ali brooks no compromise with religion, religious-based customs or the notion of a community organized around religious identity. "Enlightenment fundamentalist" is a rather unfair term, actually: isn't the whole point of the Enlightenment to rely on reason and empiricism, not, like fundamentalists, the revealed truth of a sacred text? As I said in my last column, I admire Hirsi Ali, despite her conservative associations (she's a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute) and lone-wolf style. Not every feminist has to be a social worker or a grassroots organizer. I'll bet plenty of women, Muslim and not, have been given courage by her books and example. Just to speak out is a feminist act. Still, it's probably the case that once you've described yourself as a nonbeliever, believers aren't going to take your view of their faith too seriously: you've written yourself out of the story. This would be true even if you had an encyclopedic grasp of your religion, which Hirsi Ali does not.

Because he wants to see Muslim immigrants well integrated in a Europe that currently marginalizes them, Buruma is interested in world-famous philosopher Tariq Ramadan, who says he wants to create a modern Islam, an Islam for Muslims in the West, an Islam that would provide an alternative to the jihadist fire-breathers attractive to the disaffected young. For his profile of Ramadan in *The New York Times Magazine*, Buruma was attacked at tremendous length and with staggering ferocity in *The New Republic* by Paul Berman, who thinks Ramadan is a dangerous apologist if not a covert jihadist. Certainly (as Buruma would agree) Ramadan is no friend of women's rights. One of the more troubling charges against him is that he has called for a moratorium on stoning of unchaste women—not a ban. Ramadan justified his wording by arguing that Muslims wouldn't accept a total ban. But somehow one expects a bit more leadership from the man who wants to guide millions of European Muslims—who don't, after all, practice stoning. Buruma himself famously described Ramadan as a cultural conservative, the Muslim equivalent of Jerry Falwell on social issues. Beside the important question of whether Falwellian values are a good thing, there's also the question of whether they make for the peaceful civic relations Buruma wants. In the United States, religion-backed social conservatism has been associated with endless strife—around public schools, family law, women's rights, church-state relations—much of it trumped up out of nothing (war on Christmas, anyone?) to feed the sense of grievance that keeps the donations flowing and the pews packed.

Berman and Buruma took shots at each other in a recent *New York Review of Books*, but in a way it's pointless for non-Muslims to weigh in on Islam. Why should Muslims care, any more than a Jew cares what a Hindu thinks about Moses? It's their religion, and they'll figure out what they want to make of it. Religious texts bear almost any interpretation—Jesus scorned material wealth, but millions of Christians think their faith will make them rich. Likewise, Muslims can find whatever they want in the Koran and the *hadith*. But to the extent that non-Muslims have a role in choosing who has access to the media, who is taken to represent the group (whether or not they actually do), why can't there be more choices? If Hirsi Ali is too alienated from her former community to speak for it, Tariq Ramadan strikes me as the latest edition of the elder who claims to represent the community but actually represents the interests of fathers, husbands and brothers. Ramadan has been much in the news because he was banned from entering the United States to take up a position at Notre Dame. This was wrong, of course. If he was good enough for the Catholics of South Bend, Indiana, why should the government get a veto? Still, why do discussions about Islam in the modern world revolve around him? Frankly, I'd rather hear from Marjane Satrapi, whose *Persepolis*, a brilliant graphic memoir of growing up under the Ayatollah Khomeini, has just been made into a dark, tragicomic and equally brilliant animated film. And from Pakistani-born Mohsin Hamid, author of the hilarious novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Maybe art can go where atheism cannot. ■

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Will the Real Generation Obama Please Stand Up?

Gen X, long forgotten, is toiling in the trenches and changing the face of progressive politics.

by LAKSHMI CHAUDHRY

"Each and every time, a new generation has risen up and done what's needed to be done. Today we are called once more—and it is time for our generation to answer that call," declared Barack Obama, uttering the word "generation" no fewer than thirteen times in his speech announcing his intention to run for President. There is no mistaking his campaign theme: it's time for the old to move over and make way for the new.

Obama's book *The Audacity of Hope* makes it clear just whom he's calling old: "In the back-and-forth between Clinton and Gingrich, and in the elections of 2000 and 2004, I sometimes felt as if I were watching the psychodrama of the baby boom generation—a tale rooted in old grudges and revenge plots hatched on a handful of college campuses long ago—played out on the national stage," writes Obama. It's a theme he's returned to with increasing frequency lately. "There's no doubt that we represent the kind of change Senator Clinton can't deliver on. And part of it's generational," Obama told Fox News in early November. "Senator Clinton and others have been fighting some of the same fights since the '60s. It makes it very difficult for them to bring the country together to get things done."

For Obama, who is 46, and his followers, boomer politics clearly have to go. What is less obvious is whom Obama represents. He often speaks to the Millennials, recently telling cheering college kids in South Carolina, "It's your generation's turn." But rarely mentioned is Obama's own generation, i.e., Generation X, the Lost Generation, whose name has been virtually erased from the national conversation.

"We hear plenty about people in their teens and twenties, and even more about people in their fifties, but the stodgy old species known as the thirtysomething has been shuttled off, like Molly Ringwald herself, to some sort of Camp Limbo for demographic lepers," fumes *Details* editor at large Jeff Gordinier in his upcoming book, *X Saves the World*. A recent *Chicago Tribune* article on Obama's message of generational change focuses exclusively on 18- to 30-year-olds, discussing every other living generation in passing but with nary a mention of his own peers.

The irony is that X-ers—a sociocultural label typically used to describe those born between 1961 and 1976—have become invisible at a time when they are changing the face of politics. As Jerome Armstrong, founder of MyDD.com and best known as the Blogfather of the progressive netroots, says, "It's people drawn from Generation X—the people who have gotten involved in politics this decade—who have brought about the whole new movement of progressive Democrats."

A 1990 *Time* magazine cover story described the then–twentysomething generation variously as "lazy," "passive" and possessing "only a hazy sense of their own identity." As the decade rolled along, the same kids would soon be dubbed "conservative." But many of the X-ers were less lost than lost in translation, their rejection of politics-as-usual mistaken for apathy,

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their questioning of liberal credo interpreted as "backlash" politics, their anxiety about economic security condemned as materialism and their reluctance to be identified either by labels or with larger institutions dismissed as a lack of commitment.

The conservative image was largely a creation of what we now call the right-wing noise machine, which took aim at programs like Social Security and Medicare in the name of generational "fairness." For much of the '90s headlines were saturated with stories fed by Gen X organizations—the vast majority funded by right-wing and corporate sponsors—eager to pillory their greedy, spendthrift (read, liberal) elders. That the polling data revealed no such generational divide in support for these programs, merely greater doubts about their future among the young, hardly mattered. The X-er economic philosophy was better described by Ted Halstead in *The Atlantic Monthly* as "balanced-budget populism," combining fiscal responsibility with a concern for income inequality.

In its voting patterns, moreover, Gen X defies its rightward-leaning rap. The generation that John Judis and Ruy Teixeira recently referred to in *The American Prospect* as a "bulwark of the Republican vote" has in fact voted Democratic in every presidential election, with the exception of 2004. And that includes 1992, when Gen X came out in large numbers and voted for that GOP favorite, Bill Clinton. There hasn't been much difference between our generation's voting record and that of our boomer elders.

Indeed, many of the political and cultural orientations of Gen X have been recast as the "new progressive" politics. The scalding contempt for the mainstream press expressed by bloggers was ingrained in the Gen X point of view long before the Iraq War. The failures of Judith Miller and the *New York Times* could hardly surprise the likes of Mark Saltveit, who offered this eerily prescient media critique in 1994:

> Today's press corps is largely worthless—a pack of shallow conformists so easily manipulated that it's a joke.... Maybe the [boomer] Pepsi Generation is doomed to shallow group thought and trend-mongering through years of training by MCA, CBS, and *Time*. New technology for cable TV, desktop publishing, and cheap recording studios arrived just in time for slackers.

When not ranting bitterly against real or perceived injustices, X-ers have relied on their other favorite mode of social critique: political satire. In his book, Gordinier points to a generational legacy of a distinctive brand of political humor that blends angry idealism with a studied disdain for ideology and partisanship—exactly the kind that's gone mainstream with Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert.

Where Gen X comedians have remained above the partisan fray, many of their peers have become die-hard Democrats over the past seven years due mainly to their outrage at the George W. Bush presidency. Generation Y may hold the numerical key to a Democratic victory in future elections, but it's those pesky thirty- and fortysomethings who seek to shape the future of the party and redefine the word "progressive."

There's no better example of a "new progressive" than Jerome Armstrong. Born in 1964, he long identified as an independent, working for environmental groups or public-service organizations like the Peace Corps while remaining wary of party politics. "My view was, Well, if I was in politics, boy, would it be different. It would be something very idealistic. But that didn't really seem possible at the time, so why start down that path," he says.

Bill Clinton was at least partly responsible for the lack of political engagement that characterized the '90s. His election in 1992, when he pulled in 52 percent of the under-25 vote, marked a hope-stirring thaw during a long winter of conservative dominance. Gordinier says Clinton was in many ways "our first political love who broke our hearts. We've never been able to trust any politician quite in that same way again." The sense of betrayal combined with the ugly partisan politics of the era reinforced the sense of disillusionment. Gary Ruskin, who directed the Congressional Accountability Project at the time, told *The Atlantic Monthly*, "Republicans and Democrats have become one and the same—they are both corrupt at the core and behave like children who are more interested in fighting with each other than in getting anything accomplished."

It's those pesky thirty- and fortysomethings who seek to shape the future of the Democratic Party and redefine the word 'progressive.'

But then came a governor from Texas who changed everything. "In 2000, there was this realization for people my age: Hell, there is a difference between Democrats and Republicans. George Bush proved that," Armstrong says. It was also clear that the only force that could stop the Bush bandwagon was, for better or worse, the Democratic Party. Third parties were no longer the answer—even though many X-ers had voted for Ralph Nader in the past—and X-ers had never embraced street protests like the boomers. So they turned to the medium most of them knew best: the Internet.

If George Bush introduced X-ers to the value of partisanship, the Internet offered something just as valuable in the jittery aftermath of 9/11: community. "It's easy to forget how amazing this felt back then. But for many of us there was a feeling of being lost and politically isolated," Armstrong says. The feeling was not limited to X-ers, but they were a generation that had long been defined by an aversion to groups. "It was more anti–fake community," says Armstrong. "We didn't like being controlled or defined by an association with these fake communities like nationality, or religion or [corporate] brands." The Internet always carried the potential for connection, but X-ers would use it to create a vast array of political and purely social blogs, networking sites and other forms of community, which we now refer to as Web 2.0.

As the "stolen" elections were quickly followed by 9/11, its aftermath and then the invasion of Iraq, X-ers were uniquely

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situated to create a new form of activism that blended technology with political resistance. "The Millennials were too young to be heavily into politics at the time," says Armstrong. "But we also understood the technology in a way that baby boomers did not." X-ers were better able to develop the potential of online activism—from raising money to organizing meet-ups—having been present and intimately involved in the development of the web during the dot-com heyday. To be clear, the X-ers are not the netroots—which includes progressives of all ages—but they are indisputably its creators.

X-er progressives are far less inspired by the idea of 'saving the world' than fixing the local school system or creating a green transit alternative.

By 2002 Armstrong had embraced his newfound identity as a Democrat and joined the Howard Dean campaign, where, along with fellow X-ers like Markos Moulitsas and Zephyr Teachout, he helped shape the first netroots-driven presidential candidacy. "Technology gave people of my generation the revolutionary opportunity to get involved in politics so late in our life, and enter it at a fairly high level," he says.

The "new progressive" sensibility, however, extends far beyond the netroots. It includes leaders like Andrea Batista Schlesinger, the 31-year-old executive director of the Drum Major Institute (DMI), who is helping transform the civil rights–era foundation into a progressive public policy organization. Or David Callahan, who started his political career protesting a local nuclear power plant as a 14-year-old, and went on to establish the think tank Demos. While members of this new generation of activist leaders are likely to hold different opinions on specific political issues, what binds them together is a political orientation that is distinct from boomer politics.

"My generation has more of an interest in rethinking ideas," Callahan says—figuring out "whether the big liberal ideas of the twentieth century are in fact appropriate for the twenty-first." While much of the media attention is given to establishment-baiters like Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, authors of *Break Through: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility*, a better example of a Gen X challenge to liberal credo is 40-year-old Majora Carter, whose Sustainable South Bronx is re-envisioning environmental and racial justice not "as a moral crusade but as an economic-development" issue. Carter's activism has all the hallmarks of Gen X politics: from her outsider status in the green movement to her entrepreneurial spirit, community-based focus and emphasis on fiscal responsibility and real-life outcomes.

X-ers take a novel view of the relationships between ideology, identity and activism. While Armstrong calls himself "non-ideological" and Batista Schlesinger is a "full-blown ideologue," their paths to progressive politics were oddly similar. Both were progressive in their activism long before they embraced that identity. "I don't come from a lefty background, nor was I always a lefty," says Batista Schlesinger, who says she didn't "become progressive with a capital P until seven years ago."

These "practivists," as Jessica Clark described them in *In These Times*, "see politics as a fluid field of choice rather than a hard-and-fast test" of ideological commitment. DMI, for example, describes itself as dedicated to "challenging the tired orthodoxies of both the right and the left." And Callahan's latest book, *The Moral Center*, takes the left to task for ignoring issues of personal morality, long seen as a "conservative" issue.

This is also a generation of progressives intensely focused on outcomes. None more so than netroots activists like Armstrong, whose identity as a "partisan progressive" is best captured by this Harry Truman quote: "The Democratic Party does not dodge issues or seek to gloss them over. We state them boldly. We propose concrete and practical action to solve them.... It is a program of what should be done and what our experience tells us can be done."

With this pragmatic approach comes a certain impatience with the "romanticism" of boomer lefties. X-er progressives are far less inspired by the idea of "saving the world" than fixing the local school system or creating a green transit alternative that can be replicated across communities, as long as it's a specific problem with a concrete solution. "We're not trying to change things. We're trying to fix things," Anne McCord proudly told *Time* in 1990. "We are the generation that is going to renovate America. We are going to be its carpenters and janitors."

It's a roll-up-your-sleeves, nuts-and-bolts politics, built on collaboration. "Before I had a political ideology, I had a process," says Batista Schlesinger. These process-oriented values are reflected in adjectives—collaborative, open, transparent, bottom-up, fair—rather than big vision statements or policy slogans like Limited Government or Global Peace. The netroots' "user-generated politics" is a natural extension of these values. "What they stand for is different from traditional liberalism. And the influx of the Millenials, who are now aligning themselves with Democratic politicians and policies, is a direct result of that shift," says Armstrong.

X-er ambition is perfectly embodied by the now infamous anti-Hillary spoof of Apple's "Big Brother" ad, created by 33-year-old Phil de Vellis, who declared it a victory for citizen politics. "The underlying point," he says, "was that the old political machine no longer holds all the power." No one, however, picked up on the subtext of generational change—a message that has become the rallying slogan of the Obama campaign.

But does Obama represent a new generation of lefty politics? *The Audacity of Hope* certainly hits all the same notes as many of his X-er peers: the journey from political alienation to commitment; an impatience with the ideological legacy of the '60s; measured skepticism toward liberal verities; a push for a new paradigm for a new millennium. And he displays characteristic X-er impatience with the traditional left/right divide on policy matters. As Obama told a New Hampshire audience, "I'm a Democrat. I'm considered a progressive Democrat. But if a Republican or a conservative or a libertarian or a free-marketer has a better idea, I am happy to steal ideas from anybody, and in that sense I'm agnostic."

But Obama's vision of generational change has been remarkably thin on the details. For all the fuss over his Facebook

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following, his netroots strategy looks a lot like old-fashioned marketing. "He's skipped right over the blogosphere to the younger social networking sites, where he can be embraced in a way that he is more comfortable with," says Armstrong, arguing that Obama's boomer campaign managers prefer to sell him to the Millennials as a cool brand name with its very own catchy slogan, "Generation Obama," that they can embrace.

It may be one reason X-ers have not overwhelmingly embraced his candidacy. Hillary Clinton is way out ahead in polls among all age categories except the Millennials, who favor Obama. Of course, there is a vast gap between national polls and the voting preferences of activists. In a straw poll conducted at the Take Back America conference this year, John Edwards was far more popular with X-ers than any other age group, perhaps because he has been far more willing to openly challenge the Democratic establishment than his rivals. Their second choice was Obama. The boomers split their votes more evenly among the three candidates.

The latest research conducted by the Pew Research Center picks "Anxious Xers" as the swing voters to watch in 2008. "They're at a stage in the life cycle where they get into citizenship and voting in ways they weren't four or even eight years ago," says president Andrew Kohut, though they're anxious about the same things they worried about as twentysomethings: income equality, lack of wage growth, the environment and, more recently, rising healthcare costs. The good news for Democrats, says Kohut, is that they're leaning progressive.

One way or the other, progressive X-ers will likely find themselves back in the headlines over the coming years. A new generation of leaders—be it Obama or netroots bloggers or social justice activists—is at the right age and moment, with the skills and knowledge required to change the political landscape, plus the gift of historical hindsight. It's an important moment, but its outcome remains uncertain. The netroots may fall prey to technological triumphalism and narrow definitions of gain, much like those who got swept up in the dot-com boom. Generational change may also quickly devolve into political infighting if X-ers and boomers are unwilling or unable to find a way to build on the old toward the new. Or X-ers may end up like the Silent Generation, who, sandwiched between the GI Generation and the baby boomers, were simply squished into obscurity.

If all else fails, there's this small consolation: At least we lowly X-ers can swing-vote our way out of Camp Limbo in 2008. Move over, Security Mom—here comes Molly Ringwald. ■

The Optimist

Uri Avnery and the fate of the two-state solution.

by EYAL PRESS

On a steamy summer day in 1982, an Israeli journalist named Uri Avnery rode in an armored Mercedes through a maze of streets in Beirut. The air was full of tension—Israel had just invaded Lebanon, and for several weeks the skies above the country's war-torn capital had been streaked with fighter planes. The Mercedes pulled to a stop in front of an elegant apartment building in the western half of the city, where a cluster of bodyguards escorted Avnery inside. A short while later, a small man dressed in khaki military fatigues and a matching cap appeared. It was Yasir Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, meeting face to face with an Israeli for the first time.

The two men sat next to each other on a sofa. Avnery held a tape recorder in his hand, but he seemed less interested in interviewing Arafat, who at that time was regarded as Israel's mortal enemy, a terrorist with whom it was forbidden to engage in dialogue, than in conveying a message to him. "The fact that we are sitting here," Avnery said, speaking English with a thick German accent, "is a sign for the future that our two peoples will in the end find a solution.... There will be a Palestinian state and there will be a state of Israel and the two people will peacefully live together in two states that slowly become not only good neighbors but more than this." Arafat smiled serenely at these words. Then he leaned forward and, jabbing his thumb into the air, proclaimed, "One state! One state!" Avnery smiled back. "I think many Israelis would not agree to this. I think about this we will have to argue in the future."

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Uri Avnery meeting Yasir Arafat in Beirut, 1982, as shown on the cover of *Haolam Hazeh*

Arafat is no longer around to carry on this argument. Avnery still is, to the dismay of many Israelis who probably wish he'd disappeared along with their country's former archnemesis. Uri Avnery is 84, with a shock of white hair and a thick white beard, but he has lost none of his fighting spirit. He is Israel's oldest political agitator, the founder of Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc) and a veteran of more demonstrations than perhaps any person in Israel alive today. Mohammed Khatib, a

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Palestinian activist I met last summer, nodded immediately at the mention of his name. "*Adam achla*," he said of Avnery. ("Great guy.")

This is not how Avnery is described by many Israelis, who, if they've heard of him, would more likely tell you this so-called man of peace has done nothing but stir up trouble all his life. Avnery might not deny the charge. "I was never a quiet man," he once remarked to a documentary filmmaker. That's putting it mildly. In 1950 Avnery began publishing an irreverent newsweekly, *Haolam Hazeh* ("This World"), which so inflamed the country's ruling elite that Isser Harel, chief of Israel's secret service at the time, wrote that Avnery was "Public Enemy Number 1" in the eyes of the Zionist establishment. On several occasions *Haolam Hazeh*'s offices were bombed by unknown assailants; Avnery was set upon by thugs who bloodied his face and broke his arms in an apparent effort to silence him. It didn't work. In 1965 Avnery launched and won a maverick campaign for a seat in the Knesset, where he served for the next eight years as the often-lonely champion of an array of radical causes: full equality for Arab citizens, the disestablishment of religion, the creation of a Palestinian state in the territories Israel occupied in 1967.

That the last idea does not seem so radical today attests to the fact that, like the small number of Israelis who came to the conclusion that their country will never know peace until Palestinians have a nation of their own, Avnery was a man ahead of his time. Remarkably, Avnery reached this conclusion not long after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, decades before many of Israel's leaders were prepared to acknowledge that "Palestinians" even exist. When Israeli historian Tom Segev sees Avnery, he told me recently, he often thinks to himself, "Here is the man who for sixty years has been right."

And yet there is no denying that, perhaps more than ever, Avnery is a man radically out of step with the mood in his country: an unwavering optimist who still believes peace will come and who remains resolutely convinced the vision he laid out to Arafat in 1982 will come to pass. During the mid-1990s, when the Oslo peace process still looked promising, resistance to this notion emanated almost exclusively from the Israeli right. Today, mention of the two-state solution elicits nearly as much skepticism on the center and the left. The failed Camp David summit in 2000, the eruption of the second intifada later that year, the violent fragmentation of the Palestinian movement this past June—all this has turned many formerly avid supporters of peace into disillusioned cynics. A recent survey found that nearly two-thirds of Israelis no longer believe negotiations will lead to a settlement anytime soon. On the moderate left, an increasingly common view is that, with the Islamist Hamas movement in charge of Gaza and a wellspring of hatred and mistrust on both sides, the best that can be hoped for is to manage the conflict. Many radical critics believe Israel's annexation of growing swaths of the West Bank has rendered the two-state solution obsolete—and that activists should instead call for one state in which Jews and Arabs live together on equal terms.

Avnery is aware that hope is fading—"Yes, around us there's

A river is water in its loveliest form; rivers have life and sound and movement and infinty of variation, rivers are veins of the earth through which the life blood flows to the heart.

- Roderick Haig-Brown

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a gathering despair, more than ever," he admits—but he remains unflaggingly upbeat. It's hard not to see an element of tragedy in this—perhaps denial. At a time when a quarter of a million Israelis live in the West Bank, when Palestinians are bitterly divided, when many Israelis have become inured to the daily outrages of the occupation and no outside pressure for a just settlement can be expected from the United States, why does Avnery remain optimistic? Why does he believe that the warring factions in what seems increasingly like the world's most intractable conflict can learn to put aside their grievances?

Avnery's right-wing detractors would likely say it's because he hasn't come to grips with the depth of animosity the Arab world harbors toward Zionism, a hostility he and much of the left are often accused of sharing. It's true that some radical critics of Israel believe the world would be a better place had Zionism never come to fruition. But Avnery isn't one of them, for reasons as much personal as political. Born in Beckhum, Germany, in 1923, he grew up in an affluent neighborhood in the northern city of Hanover. His father, Alfred, was a successful banker. He was also a Zionist. In 1933, the year Avnery turned 10 and Hitler became chancellor, the family packed up their belongings and fled to Palestine. The decision proved financially ruinous—Avnery's parents soon found themselves toiling in a Tel Aviv laundromat—but there were few regrets. "Zionism saved our lives—practically, literally," Avnery told me recently. That some now view it as a sordid colonialist enterprise, forgetting the desperation that drove Jews like his father to yearn for a homeland, reflects historical amnesia, he went on to say, though Avnery blamed this as much on Zionism's uncritical apologists as on its contemporary critics. "It's a shame. I'm sorry about it, because it shows that the history of Zionism has been killed by the denial of what Zionism has done to the Palestinians," he said.

'When you look at the surface, the situation is bad. But if you look a little bit deeper, in the minds of the people, we've won the battle.' —Avnery

The welfare of the Palestinians was not among Avnery's foremost concerns as a youth, to say the least. In 1938, at 14, he cut his teeth in the world of politics by joining the Irgun, the right-wing Jewish paramilitary group that sought to establish the Jewish state by planting bombs in crowded Arab markets and attacking the British colonial regime. The Irgun saw itself as the armed wing of a liberation movement; the British (and its Palestinian enemies) saw it as a terrorist organization. "I have never forgotten this lesson," Avnery would write decades later. "A terrorist is a freedom fighter in his own eyes; a freedom fighter is a terrorist in the eyes of his enemy." Mainstream Jewish leaders likewise viewed the Irgun with suspicion, which may be precisely what attracted Avnery to the group—here was his first chance to defy the Zionist establishment, an impulse some attribute to his background. "The true Israelis were the pioneers who came to Palestine from the Ukraine, Poland, Russia," said Michel Warschawski, a longtime acquaintance of Avnery's and a member of the radical Trotskyist group Matzpen. "Uri was too German, too educated, too civilized. And I would say all his life he's had almost a schizophrenia between, on the one hand, being very proud of his German characteristics and, on the other, feeling he is not a real sabra."

The experience of taking part in a nationalist struggle against an imperial power would eventually lead Avnery to view Palestinian rebels as a mirror image of his younger self. Meanwhile, proud Jewish patriot that he was, Avnery served in a commando unit during the 1948 war, an experience he chronicled in a book, *In the Fields of the Philistines*, that became a surprise bestseller, earning its author his first taste of fame. The book was embraced by readers yearning for tales of glory after a brutal war, but Avnery, who was seriously wounded in the fighting, intended it as a cautionary tale about the sacrifices endured by ordinary soldiers, with whom he strongly identified. When he realized this was not how it was received, he penned a sequel describing a less heroic side of the war, including atrocities perpetrated against Palestinians, which fared less well—the Israeli government blocked its publication. It was his first taste of infamy.

Shortly thereafter, Avnery and some friends purchased a moribund family magazine and launched *Haolam Hazeh*, which did little to endear him to those who might have begun to question his loyalty. A cross between *I.F. Stone's Weekly* and *Paris Match*, the magazine featured an entertaining and incendiary mix of hard-hitting exposés, radical commentary, salacious gossip items and (gracing the back cover) photos of half-naked women, a format Avnery shrewdly recognized would boost circulation. Since most Israeli newspapers of that time functioned as servile (and largely colorless) mouthpieces for the various political parties they represented, *Haolam Hazeh* amounted to the journalistic equivalent of a Molotov cocktail hurled at the Israeli elite and was treated as such. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion referred to it derisively as that "certain paper." Ministers feared appearing in its pages, not least because the magazine's popularity gave its publisher an influential platform for a bracingly unorthodox political agenda. *Haolam Hazeh* attacked the Israeli religious establishment. It called for an end to martial law in Arab villages inside Israel (which wasn't lifted until 1966). It introduced readers to a phrase that had never before appeared in an Israeli paper: "the Palestinian people." And it published in-depth accounts of incidents such as the 1953 massacre in Qibya, a village in the Jordanian-occupied West Bank, where sixty-nine civilians were killed in a brutal retaliatory raid carried out by Unit 101, whose commander was a young reserve major named Ariel Sharon. It was after this that Avnery was beaten up by goons.

It is hard to appreciate how "unbelievably subversive" all this was in the Israel of the 1950s and '60s, says Tom Segev, who remembers the thrill of stealing off to a kiosk as a teenager to buy *Haolam Hazeh*. Though it indulged in its share of sensationalism, the paper also pioneered a new style of Israeli journalism—bold headlines, short punchy sentences—and glamorized a new culture centered on the shops and cafes

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Grant L. Voth is Professor Emeritus in English and Interdisciplinary Studies at Monterey Peninsula College. He received his B.A. from Concordia Senior College, his M.A. from St. Thomas College, and his Ph.D. in English from Purdue University. Professor Voth has taught at Northern Illinois University and Virginia Tech; he is the author of more than 30 articles and books, and he wrote the official study guides for many of the plays in the BBC's The Shakespeare Plays project.

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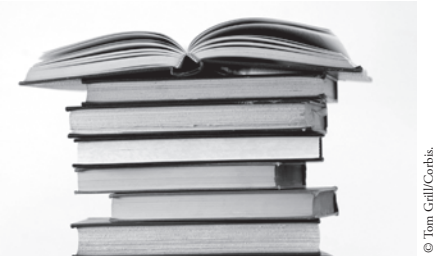

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sprouting up in Tel Aviv, where Avnery made his home and where, today, his vision has clearly triumphed. The sushi bars, the discos, the trendy neighborhoods lined with bistros, tattoo parlors and art galleries: all this would have shocked Israel's austere, kibbutz-reared socialist founders. Avnery "celebrated it before it existed," says Segev. "He invented it." With his long hair, dramatic beard and maverick opinions, he also became a minor celebrity: the freewheeling iconoclast who rode around town in a gleaming Mustang convertible and relished stirring up controversy.

These days, Avnery is more of a celebrity in Europe—where he has collected a shelf full of humanitarian prizes over the past decade, including the 2001 Right Livelihood Award (often dubbed the alternative Nobel Peace Prize)—than in his own country, where he has grown increasingly isolated. This is to some extent a product of personality. Though he has often longed to spearhead a movement, Avnery is by nature a loner, a "one-man show," as one activist put it, whom even his admirers describe as cold. When I visited him during the summer at his home in Tel Aviv, a tidy apartment decorated with Persian rugs, paintings, fresh flowers and, in one corner, a bust of Avnery himself, he offered me a glass of water and a stiff handshake. His blue eyes radiated seriousness but little trace of warmth. There was no sign of his wife, Rachel, a photographer who has been at his side for more than fifty years. Perhaps I should have expected as much: in a 2002 documentary about Avnery by filmmaker Yair Lev, Rachel let slip that Uri has never told her that he loves her.

"I don't like saying silly things," he explained stonily, as she shot him a wounded glare. He then turned on a handheld radio to tune out the conversation.

What brings out Avnery's passion is politics, for which his appetite appears unlimited, and history, on which he craves to leave a mark. Avnery still writes a weekly column that is translated into several languages and distributed by e-mail to a potentially wider audience than *Haolam Hazeh* ever reached. Strewn with historical analogies and infused with polemical verve, the columns are witty, abrasive and a marvel for the sheer mental acuity they display. But few young Israelis, and even fewer people in positions of authority, read them. Gush Shalom, the organization Avnery founded in 1993, operates on a shoestring, with nothing approaching a mass following, especially lately. In June it rallied supporters for a protest on the fortieth anniversary of Israel's occupation. A mere 5,000 people showed up.

It's hardly the first time Avnery feared his message might be falling on deaf ears. Shortly after the 1967 war, when Israel seized control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Avnery introduced a resolution in the Knesset calling for a Palestinian state to be created in the territories. One other person in the 120-member Knesset voted for it, which, for Avnery, qualified as a minor success (a book of his speeches was subsequently published under the title *1 Against 119*). At the time, Avnery's identity, like Israeli politics generally, was not centrally defined by the Palestinian conflict, nor for that matter did he consider himself a leftist. Adam Keller, a Gush Shalom activist who met him in 1969, says that back then Avnery "very much objected to being called left wing. He said the whole left-right spectrum was part of the old establishment—we want to uproot the establishment and create something new. He also tried very hard to avoid being identified only with the Palestinian issue."

As the years wore on, however, and Israel's occupation grew more entrenched, Avnery's focus narrowed. Meanwhile, the establishment was toppled, not by Avnery but by right-wing supporters of a Greater Israel, the kind of people who adore the current front-runner in polls forecasting who will become the next prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, a man almost universally reviled on the left.

Why, then, the unflagging optimism? "First of all, I'm an optimist by birth," Avnery said as we sat down in his living room. "I'm a genetic optimist—my father was an optimist, my grandfather was an optimist." Avnery added that age might lend him a sense of perspective others lack. "Look, when I and a small group of people put forward the idea of a two-state solution immediately after the war of 1948, it would have been a wild exaggeration to say there were 100 people who advocated this. Today, it is the worldwide consensus.

"When you look at the surface, the situation is bad," he went on, "but if you look a little bit deeper, in the minds of people, we've won the battle."

To those who've tracked the news from Israel lately, Avnery's self-assurance on this score might seem mildly delusional. Yet surveys indicate that roughly two-thirds of Israelis, and a comparable percentage of Palestinians, still support a two-state settlement of the conflict. Of course, this hardly means it will happen. Galia Golan, a political scientist and longtime veteran of Peace Now, believes that in Israel, "what's happened is not that people moved to the right but that they lost hope. People just aren't interested because they don't believe anything can happen. The government in Israel is weak. The Palestinians, of course, are split. Any way you look at it, it leaves you in a dead end." Hanging on the wall behind Golan's desk in Herzliya, where she teaches, is a poster of a Tel Aviv peace rally in 1995, at the height of the Oslo period. The crowd was estimated at a quarter-million. Golan was there and remembers the event well: it was the rally at which Yitzhak Rabin spoke for the last time, before a Jewish settler named Yigal Amir assassinated him to prevent the possibility of a withdrawal from the territories.

Avnery, who supported the Oslo agreement, believes it could have succeeded had Rabin lived. Some would argue that this gives too much weight to one person, a view of history common among Avnery's generation, which grew up in the shadow of Hitler, Stalin, Churchill, Mao. "For Uri, politics is made first by individuals," said Warschawski. "What those of us on the left call class struggle, he is absolutely oblivious to."

Today, the debate about Oslo is almost moot: the question preoccupying Israeli peace advocates is not whether the agreement could have worked but what to do in light of the Hamas takeover of Gaza. The Israeli government is trying desperately to prop up Fatah in the West Bank. Avnery believes the strategy is bound to fail and that the government will eventually have to reach out to Hamas, something he's already done himself, meeting in person with several members of the party whom Israel has since imprisoned.

Many Israelis regard such activity as borderline traitorous. Avnery is familiar with the charge. In the 1970s, he helped

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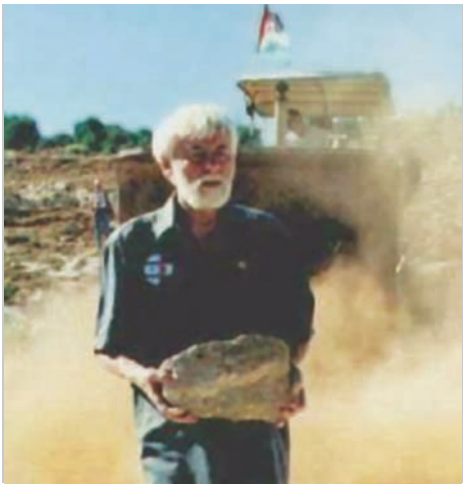
launch the Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, which began arranging secret meetings with the PLO, then considered beyond the pale. The venture contained a certain irony, since in the 1960s Avnery himself had dismissed the members of Fatah as "terrorists." A decade later he was dashing off letters to Arafat. After their dramatic 1982 encounter in Beirut, a PLO spokesman announced that the meeting had occurred. As he drove home to Israel, Avnery heard on the radio no fewer than four Israeli ministers denounce him for treason. All four, he says, later met with Arafat themselves.

History, Avnery believes, will likely repeat itself. It's a controversial view—even on the left, there are people who doubt a compromise can be reached with Hamas, which cites *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* approvingly in its founding charter and holds all of Palestine to be a sacred Islamic trust. Many Palestinian leaders have written off working with Hamas as well. Avnery, a staunch secularist, clearly finds Hamas's worldview off-putting but notes that some of its leaders have indicated willingness to stop fighting Israel if it withdraws to the 1967 lines. He also believes it is not Israel's job to choose the Palestinian representatives, particularly after it ruthlessly undermined Fatah when Arafat was alive.



Avnery helping to rebuild Palestinian homes in the West Bank

Some would argue that Arafat himself did a fine job of damaging Fatah by lining the pockets of his deputies while allowing key institutions to decay. Not Avnery, who is rarely at a loss for damning things to say about Israeli leaders (Shimon Peres—"a man without principle"; Ehud Barak—"a megalomaniac") yet seems incapable of mustering a critical thought about the former PLO chairman. Arafat possessed a "genius" for preventing the strands of his movement from unraveling, Avnery told me. But wasn't he also authoritarian and corrupt? "It's irrelevant," he said. Propped up on a shelf in Avnery's apartment were no fewer than three photos of Arafat, a fondness many find curious. "Where is the criticism he educated us on?" asked Segev, who on several occasions tagged along on visits to see Arafat that Avnery helped to arrange. The excursions had the feel of official tributes paid to the Great Leader in a totalitarian state, Segev said. When he asked Arafat a question one time about human rights abuses carried out by his security services, eyebrows were raised, as though he'd committed an inexcusable faux pas.

The most powerful argument against the two-state solution can be found not in the statements of Hamas hardliners but in the facts on the ground that Israeli settlers have been creating for decades, with no pause to see how negotiations might fare. One morning last summer I traveled through the West Bank with Dror Etkes, a researcher formerly with Peace Now who earlier this year published a report showing that 90 percent of Israeli settlements sprawl beyond their official boundaries. We drove north in his battered pickup truck along a bypass road in the direction of Psagot, a hilltop settlement that overlooks Ramallah. Etkes pulled over. "See that?" he said. Scattered atop a hill in the near distance were a bunch of makeshift trailers and antennas. It was an illegal settlement outpost, built on privately owned Palestinian land. The Israeli government has vowed to block such outposts, but those vows have acquired an increasingly hollow ring. "A classic land grab," said Etkes. Later, along a rutted road slicing through an otherwise isolated stretch of terrain, we came upon a cluster of concrete bungalows next to an open field enclosed by razor wire. The land was uninhabited, but it had been fenced off for a reason: to reserve space for more housing once capacity in the nearby settlement is reached.

It is hard to find an Israeli these days whose confidence in the peace process was not shaken by the wave of suicide bombings that struck the country several years ago. It is equally difficult to find a Palestinian whose faith has not been eroded by the inexorable expansion of the settlements. There were 130,000 settlers in the West Bank in 1993, the year of the famous handshake between Rabin and Arafat. There are 270,000 today. "Israeli governments used Oslo in order to change, dramatically and irreversibly, the geography of the West Bank," Etkes said. In 2000, the year Ehud Barak blamed Arafat alone for Camp David's failure—a spurious claim that quickly became holy writ among many American commentators—construction began on 4,000 housing units in the West Bank, according to Etkes. This was the highest number since the Oslo agreement was signed.

The settlements, the bypass roads, the security checkpoints built like international border crossings, the massive 270-mile separation wall—all this has acquired an air of permanence that some view as grounds for a paradigm shift. At a debate last May in Tel Aviv, historian Ilan Pappé, a radical critic of Zionism, declared, "The real two-states formula is the one which we see being implemented in front of our eyes: half the West Bank annexed to Israel, and the other half as a Bantustan surrounded by walls and fences but allowed to fly a Palestinian flag." The time has come for the peace movement to call for turning Israel and Palestine into one democratic state, he argued. Pappé's opponent was Avnery, who was having none of it. "It is far easier to dismantle a settlement, to dismantle settlements, to dismantle all the settlements—far easier than to force 6 million Jewish Israelis to dismantle their state," Avnery countered.

The problem with the one-state solution is that "nobody wants it except a few intellectuals," Avnery told me. And who exactly will dismantle the growing archipelago of settlements? "Sharon, with all his faults, has shown that it can be done," Avnery insisted. He was referring to Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza, which did not spark as fierce an opposition as many had anticipated. But what has happened since has hardly bolstered prospects for peace. The fact that Gaza is now ruled by Hamas and that the Israeli border town of Sderot has come under steady rocket fire has played into the hands of those who warn that even worse chaos will erupt should Israel withdraw from the West Bank. Even a popular Israeli leader would likely

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balk at such a step. Israel's prime minister, Ehud Olmert, is deeply unpopular, and the man waiting in the wings, Netanyahu, is about as likely to end the occupation as George W. Bush is to lead the call for pulling US troops out of Iraq.

Things could change if something significant emerges from the upcoming Israeli-Arab summit in Annapolis, Maryland. But few observers expect this to happen; the barriers to forging an agreement in the short term are immense. A relative of mine joked that the slogan "Two states for two peoples" should give way to "Three prisons for two peoples" (meaning Gaza, the West Bank and Israel itself). It's enough to make you wonder why Israelis who yearn to live in a country at peace with its neighbors bother to stick around. The truth is, a growing number don't. Estimates of the number of Israelis leaving the country in recent years range from 19,000 to 30,000 annually, a figure that exceeds the number of Jews making aliyah. In 2004 writer Amos Elon, born in Vienna in 1925 and for decades one of Israel's most esteemed journalists, shipped the last of his belongings to Tuscany, where he now lives permanently, having grown deeply distraught at what's become of his country. Shulamit Aloni, a veteran civil rights activist and recipient of the Israel Prize, the country's most prestigious public citizenship award, hasn't departed yet, but she told me she feels increasingly despondent. "I'm pessimistic," she said. "I fought for years so that we would have a model state—instead we have an ethnocracy."

Avnery is not without worries of his own. In a book published forty years ago, he wrote that "without a policy aimed at securing acceptance by the peoples in the region, any security [for Israel] could only be temporary." Today, instead of seeking acceptance, Israel is erecting walls, and all around it Islamic movements are gathering strength. Avnery admitted to viewing the latter development "with trepidation." But he has also lived long enough to know that walls built to divide people can be torn down. One morning in early September, he made his way to Liberty Bell Garden, in Jerusalem, for a small victory celebration. Earlier in the week, the Israeli High Court of Justice had ruled that a mile-long stretch of Israel's separation barrier must be rerouted, since its sole purpose had been to accommodate a future Jewish settlement. The case had been brought before the court on behalf of the residents of Bil'in, a West Bank village where both Jewish and Palestinian activists had been staging weekly protests, several of which Avnery attended.

In an article written shortly after the ruling was announced, Avnery acknowledged that the decision fell short of a complete victory: the court did not call on Israel to dismantle other parts of the wall that cross over the Green Line, as the International Court of Justice had done in 2004. Even so, he hailed the ruling as a symbol of what ordinary people can accomplish and a reminder that history is not static. "When my friends fall prey to despair, I show them a piece of painted concrete, which I bought in Berlin," he mused. "It is one of the remnants of the Berlin wall.… I tell them that I intend, when the time comes, to apply for a franchise to sell pieces of the separation wall." ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

vitamin A and the T4 thyroid hormone. It seems it has been inconvenient here to acknowledge the European research.

So far, there are no published reports on the interaction of these chemicals with transthyretin. If there is no poisoning, the chemical companies and the EPA would have published papers saying so. The lack of such data suggests guilt, not innocence, for the suspect chemicals. Since all these poisons produce the same or similar effects, it stands to reason they act the same way. Tests for the reaction of these chemicals with transthyretin are available and not hard to do. In short, the technology to protect us is available. All that's missing is the will.

F.W. Plapp Jr.
Professor emeritus of pesticide chemistry
Texas A&M University

And Now, for a *Real* Candidate!

Mount Dora, Fla.
Thanks for the editorial "Let Dennis Debate" [Oct. 22]. I was outraged but not surprised when AARP excluded him from its debate—its magazines are filled with ads from the medical-industrial complex. Kucinich is the only presidential candidate offering meaningful healthcare reform that reduces profiteering by insurance and drug companies and creates a single-payer program guaranteeing healthcare for *all* Americans. He also supports many worthy peace initiatives.

Sue Jantz

Albuquerque
I have long admired the Congressman from Cleveland. Recently 500 of us heard Kucinich speak and answer questions for over an hour—no notes, no evasions—directly, with knowledge, awareness, humor and vision. Here is a candidate who has a record of principle, who has a sound head and can also speak to the heart. It was a revitalizing experience to say yes! yes! yes! to one after another of Kucinich's points. (And if you need "tall," there is Elizabeth Kucinich.)

Gail Taylor

Izzo: More Than Noir

Columbus, Ohio
As a professor of French at Ohio State who has been teaching Jean-Claude Izzo for years, I was delighted that the October 22 *Nation* devoted four pages to Charles Taylor's "Dark Paradise," his stunning review of Izzo's Marseilles trilogy, now available to American readers. The review captures the richness of Izzo's noir trilogy. However, Izzo was not just the author of five novels and one collection of short stories. He also published numerous volumes of poetry, contributed chapters and introductions to many alternative books on Marseilles and wrote as a journalist for *La Marseillaise*. American readers with a knowledge of French will enjoy the beautiful website created by his son, Sébastien Izzo (www.jeanclaude-izzo.com).

Danielle Marx-Scouras

And the Oscar Goes to…

Sherrill, N.Y.
If there were a language Academy Award for metaphor and imagery, Gary Younge would walk away with one for having Jim Crow conceive a son in the alleyway between de jure and de facto in his "'Jena Is America'" ["Beneath the Radar," Oct. 8]. You guys save my sanity week after week.

Sandra Miley

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Books & the Arts.

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"The First Cotillion of the Century," by A. Keller, an illustration in *Harper's Weekly*, 1901

Rules of the Game

by MARCELA VALDES

As a diplomat who served in England for fourteen years, from 1874 to 1888, the great Portuguese novelist José Maria de Eça de Queirós had no illusions about his country's position in the world during the mid- to late nineteenth century. The five novels that he published during his lifetime—*The Crime of Father Amaro* (1875), *Cousin Bazilio* (1878), *The Mandarin* (1880), *The Relic* (1887) and *The Maias* (1888)—satirized the faults of Portuguese society in order to save it. Yet he was well aware that the stratified Catholic society he dissected was already in its endgame.

Its apex had been reached a century earlier, under King João V, who had the good luck of ascending the throne in 1706, just seven years after Brazil began shipping gold to Lisbon. Midway through João V's reign, Brazil offered him another source of booty when diamonds were discovered in Bahía. By then, the tone of João V's rule was well established. He transformed the area around the capital with extravagant churches, palaces and convents. He fathered children with at least three nuns. He built the University Library at Coimbra, where Eça de Queirós would later study law. And shortly after he died in 1750, the country entered a long, precipitous fall.

The first drop came on November 1, 1755, when Lisbon was hit by the worst earthquake ever recorded in Europe. Like the 2004 quake in the Indian Ocean, the Lisbon quake was followed by an enormous tsunami, with waves that reached as far as the Caribbean Sea. As many as 60,000 Lisbon residents died in the ensuing fires, floods, famines and epidemics. In its time the disaster was notorious enough to inspire £100,000 in aid from Britain and a poem by Voltaire.

The next catastrophe marched in from France. In 1807 Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Portugal through Spain, sending the Portuguese royal family scampering to Rio de Janeiro. In their absence, Portugal's old ally England stepped in to its defense, launching the Peninsular War. Together Portuguese and British soldiers eventually drove Napoleon's army completely off the Iberian Peninsula, but the first three years of battle were fought mostly on Portuguese territory. (The rest were fought in Spain.) By the end of the war, in 1814, 100,000 Portuguese had died and much of their country had been laid waste.

The Maias.
By Eça de Queirós.
Translated by Margaret Jull Costa.
New Directions. 628 pp. $17.95.

The coup de grâce, however, was delivered by Portugal's own rulers. Having acquired a taste for the tropical luxuries of Brazil, the Braganza monarchy decided to stay in Rio. For fourteen years they ran Portugal like a colony of its colony, leaving Lisbon under the thumb of an autocratic British overseer, William Carr Beresford. In Lisbon, soldiers and intellectuals reacted to this neglect by assembling a Constitutional Cortes, or Parliament, which drafted Portugal's first Constitution. Needless to say, the nobles, the Queen and the Catholic Church were not pleased. But King João VI, who returned to Lisbon to settle the affair, accepted the new government with surprising equanimity—he had a liberal heart.

For a while, it seemed as if Portugal would transform itself into a constitutional monarchy without spilling any blood. Then the prince-regent, Pedro, declared Brazil an independent nation; João VI died; and Pedro's brother, Miguel, usurped the Portuguese throne. The nation plunged into a

Marcela Valdes is a contributing editor at Publishers Weekly. *She is at work on a book about Chile.*

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civil war. Liberal Pedro defeated reactionary Miguel in 1834, with the help of England, Spain and France. A few months later Pedro died, leaving the Portuguese Treasury near bankruptcy and the country irreparably behind England and France in terms of manufacturing, literacy, science and architecture.

By 1845, when Eça de Queirós was born, Portugal had turned into a B-list country. His most famous novel, *The Maias*—which has recently been given a vibrant new translation by the talented Margaret Jull Costa—reminds us of this situation from its outset. In 1858, it tells us, an ambassador from the Vatican wanted to rent a property in Lisbon called the Casa do Ramalhete. Though its garden was a mess—abandoned to weeds, with a dried-up waterfall, a choked pond and a marble statue of Aphrodite turning black—the monsignor liked the home's interior. The negotiations, however, went sour as soon as a number was named:

> The rent proposed by old Vilaça, the Maias family's administrator, seemed to the Monsignor so extortionate that he asked, with a smile, if Vilaça thought the Church was still living in the age of Pope Leo X. Vilaça retorted that the Portuguese nobility were likewise no longer living in the age of King João V.

A Catholic ambassador and the manager of an aristocratic fortune squabbling over who's employer has fallen into worse decline? What a lovely way to begin a book!

Eça de Queirós's main target in *The Maias* is the insular, fashionable society that Portugal's upper class built amid the country's ruins, and its hero, Carlos da Maia, is a young aristocrat of exceptional looks, wealth and taste. Carlos arrives in Lisbon in 1875, fresh out of Coimbra's medical school, seasoned by a year of Grand Tour and itching "to do something really brilliant"—though he's not quite sure what. "For him, a man of study accustomed to luxury," Eça de Queirós explains, this brilliant accomplishment needed to involve "a mixture of social status and scientific work; a profound thinking of ideas carried out in the exquisite shelter provided by great wealth."

Carlos's buddy Ega rides into Lisbon with similarly vague, contradictory ambitions. A lawyer by reluctant training, he wants to write a novel called *Memoirs of an Atom*. No, he wants to start a Portuguese version of the *Revue des deux mondes*. No, he wants to win the prettiest mistress in Lisbon. What both friends do with most success, however, is banter, order clothes and arrange interior décor.

With the help of an "architect-cum-decorator" from London, Carlos transforms dusty old Casa do Ramalhete into a stylish bachelor pad, complete with a billiards room, a music room, a smoking room and a card room ruled by his doting grandfather Afonso. His medical office is just as posh: morocco leather benches, "albums filled with photographs of half-naked actresses" and a piano, to help his nonexistent patients forget their aches.

If you're hearing overtones of *A Sentimental Education* in this précis, you're not far off the mark. Gustave Flaubert, Costa tells us in her afterword, was Eça de Queirós's "literary hero," and it's obvious that *The Maias* owes Flaubert's 1869 *Bildungsroman* a debt. Like it, *The Maias* mocks the dissipation of youthful promise in love affairs and fashion. Indeed, one of its most amusing scenes occurs when Carlos visits Ega's home, the Villa Balzac, just outside Lisbon. Ega has chosen this location ostensibly so he can concentrate on completing *Memoirs of an Atom* but actually so that he can conduct a clandestine affair. Surveying his buddy's messy bedroom, which is cluttered with books, champagne glasses, hairpins, shirts and a huge box of face powder, Carlos inquires, "And where do you work, Ega, where do you produce your great art?"

"There," Ega responds saucily, pointing in the direction of his enormous scarlet bed.

In *A Sentimental Education*, the shirts and the face powder would have been native to Paris; in *The Maias*, they're more likely to be imported. Eça de Queirós was keenly aware of this difference, which meant that the fashions widely available in Paris were, in Portugal, the exclusive province of the rich. "Civilisation comes at a very high price," Ega jokes. "What with the customs duties one has to pay, and, besides, it's second-hand, it wasn't made for us, and so it's all a bit short in the sleeve."

Nowhere is this poor tailoring clearer than when Lisbon's aristocrats decide to hold a horse race; though, as Afonso observes, it would have been more patriotic for them "to put on a good bullfight." The ersatz event is a fiasco. The ramshackle hippodrome fills with "suffocating dust." The women dress in black instead of cheery checks and stripes. The jockeys brawl over the referee's calls. "It's all pretty dire," one man in attendance observes. "For heaven's sake if you're going to have a proper horse-race you need *cocottes* and champagne, not grim faces and cold water, it just won't work."

The problem, of course, is that the horse race requires participation from members outside Carlos's circle. Lisbon's upper class can import suits and songs and magazines, but their snobbery, combined with Portugal's general poverty, prevents them from re-creating anything like the democratic, industrialized cultures they admire from afar. Unlike Flaubert's *Sentimental* hero, Frédéric Moreau, for example, Carlos socializes almost exclusively with aristocrats and gentry—that is, with people who have no need to work. And his last chance to accomplish something worthwhile founders on his reluctance to swim outside this clique.

Near the end of the book, when Carlos and Ega are growing tired of Lisbon's provincial entertainments, they take up Ega's old idea of founding "a journal that would shape literature, educate taste, elevate politics, create civilisation, and, in short, rejuvenate worm-eaten old Portugal." Filled with sudden energy and enthusiasm, they hole themselves up in Afonso's study to draw up a list of collaborators:

> However, difficulties began to emerge at once. Ega disliked almost all the writers suggested because they lacked the artistic, Parnassian elegance of style of which he wanted the magazine to be an impeccable model. And Carlos thought certain men of letters quite simply "impossible," although without wishing to confess that what mainly repelled him was their lack of manners and their appalling clothes.

Frustrated, the gentlemen turn to their usual anodyne—a passionate discussion of the future offices' décor:

> It would have to be luxuriously furnished, with sofas from Carlos's consulting rooms and a few antiques from the Toca [his country estate]; and above the door (adorned with a liveried doorman), would hang a highly polished black sign with *The Portuguese Review* in large gold letters. Carlos was smiling and rubbing his hands, thinking how pleased Maria Eduarda would be when she knew

Eça de Queirós's main target is the insular and fashionable world built amid Portugal's ruins.

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about this decision.... Ega, on the other hand, could already see the canary-colored magazine piled up in the windows of bookshops, discussed at the Count de Gouvarinho's soirées, leafed through with horror by politicians in the Chamber.

And so the practical matter of finding writers for this canary-colored masterpiece is lost amid the two men's fantasies. Ten years later, when they meet after a long separation, Ega recalls their youthful ambitions (to be a great scientist! to write a magnificent book!) and declares, "We have failed in life, my friend!"

Retail therapy is, in fact, one of the novel's leitmotifs. Like out-of-shape yuppies who buy mountaineering jackets designed for treks up Mount Everest, Eça de Queirós's characters regularly purchase objects as substitutes for endeavors that they cannot, or will not, undertake themselves. Thus, Carlos's top-of-the-line laboratory equipment replaces actual scientific research; Ega's Wildesque fur coat becomes a stopgap for membership in a real bohemian society. And the ultimate substitute is, of course, their circle's use of luxury goods as a replacement for a true reformation of Portuguese society—a situation that Eça de Queirós ridicules when Carlos's friend Dâmaso Salcede announces his belief in individual action:

"I believe that every person should contribute in some way to the civilisation of their country."

"Well spoken, Senhor Salcede!" cried Afonso. "You have said a great and noble thing!"

"It's true, isn't it?" declared Dâmaso triumphantly, bursting with pride. "I, for example..."

"You?" came the cry from every side. "What have *you* done for civilisation?"

"I've ordered a white frock-coat for the day of the races and I'll be wearing a blue veil on my hat!"

Ultimately, Carlos's moral failure is poignant, rather than merely comedic, because he is one of the few characters in *The Maias* to display real intelligence. During the few months he actually applies himself to his medical practice, he saves a woman from diphtheria and comes up with the idea for a sort of flu vaccine. So when Carlos moves to Paris after the death of his grandfather (and after losing Maria Eduarda, a stunning *femme fatale*), Portugal's hope for a First World future seems to leave town with him.

A friend of the family sums it up at Afonso's funeral: "You won't find people like those Maias now, my boys—lion-hearted, generous, valiant! Everything seems to be dying in this wretched country of ours!" Ega puts it more plainly: how will Portugal ever have the "personnel" it needs to catch up with the rest of Europe if he and Carlos, "who have all the right skills," do nothing but drive their dogcarts?

It's hard to tell how much Eça de Queirós subscribed to the belief that progress in Portugal needed to come from the upper class—he does the fly on the wall rather too well. Occasionally, his omniscient narrator will let loose an opinion or two—remarking, for example, that the "poison" of dilettantism had entered Carlos's blood—but mostly Eça de Queirós subordinates his narrator to his characters' perceptions. Instead, he relies on more subtle techniques like symbolism, juxtaposition, allegory and irony to communicate his own opinions.

Reading *The Maias*, then, is rather like watching *L'Avventura*: you have to keep an eye on the background in order to understand the foreground. In the scene featuring Dâmaso's blue veil, for example, it's clear that he is being ridiculed for his superficiality. ("'You?' came the cry from every side.") What's less obvious is that Eça de Queirós scorns Afonso's hypocrisy as well. For that, one must remember that some 250 pages earlier Eça de Queirós informed us that during the civil war between Pedro and Miguel,

Afonso was to be found at the Epsom races [in England], riding in a gig, wearing a large false nose and uttering fearsome war whoops, utterly indifferent to the fate of his brother masons, who were, at that very moment, being driven along the alleyways of the Bairro Alto in Lisbon by the Infante Dom Miguel mounted on his fine Alter do Chão stallion.

Eça de Queirós also employs descriptions as a kind of foreshadowing, remarking, for example, that a woman's red parasol obscures a man's head "like a large bloodstain" some twenty pages before she provokes him to suicide. (Costa does a marvelous job of rendering these important details—she knows that Eça de Queirós, like Flaubert, employs "a naturalist surface with a symbolic subtext.")

Reading these traces, one finds hints that Eça de Queirós did not entirely escape the snobbery of his society. His Jews all prove greedy, treacherous or fickle. His three most admirable characters turn out to be not only aristocrats but blood relations. Indeed, he seems to suggest that the departure of an educated aristocrat like Carlos constitutes a sort of Portuguese brain drain: there aren't enough men of sense and education to take his place. Even Ega succumbs to Portugal's more vulgar comforts after Carlos leaves the country, gaily mocking the ignorance of a prostitute, for example, before raffling her off among his friends. "Oh," he says, recalling this elegant adventure, "it had been a splendid night!"

Eça de Queirós has a knack for turning the screws on his characters when he wants to, and this talent had led many critics to approach *The Maias* as a caustic satire—which, at times, it is. But the greatness of Eça de Queirós's masterwork, like the greatness of Jean Renoir's film *The Rules of the Game*, lies in its ability to blend pointed criticism with genuine pathos and nobility. Indeed, it's here that Eça de Queirós surpasses his essentially misanthropic hero, Flaubert.

Take for example, the tenderness with which Eça de Queirós communicates Carlos's love for Afonso, which may be based on Eça de Queirós's own relationship with his grandparents, who raised him after his unmarried mother started a legitimate family:

Of his mother, he did not possess so much as a daguerreotype, or even a pencil sketch. His grandfather had told him that she was fair-haired. He knew nothing more. He had not known [his parents]; he had not fallen asleep in their arms; he had never received the warmth of their affection. Father and mother were, for him, like the symbols of some conventional religion. Father, mother, and loved ones were all contained in his grandfather.

Or take Carlos's affair with the apparently married Maria Eduarda, which begins as a superficial infatuation with her Parisian wardrobe and her "foreign glamour" (she descends on Lisbon from France) but eventually forces him to confront his snobbery. "What was it you loved in me?" she demands of him. "Was it the fact that I belonged to another man, was it my name, the chic of having an adulterous affair, my clothes perhaps? Or was it me, my body, my soul and my love for you?" It takes Carlos a good night of soul-searching to answer that one.

There's no doubt that *The Maias* is, as Harold Bloom has said, an account of "the decadence of Portugal in its long decline," but the novel is also an aging man's paean

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By John Fleming

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to young love and friendship and misbehavior. The work is, after all, semiautobiographical (Ega being a clever visual pun on Eça), and its ending is not so much angry as melancholy. "How everything passed!" Ega thinks when he and Carlos meet again in the book's final pages. By then, it's 1887. Ega is balding. Carlos has put on weight. Their errand for the day is to visit Casa do Ramalhete and rummage through the detritus of all the things they've lost.

These days Eça de Queirós is best remembered for the way he brought Portuguese literature out of its Romantic doldrums and infused it with the realism of its French and English counterparts. But after his death (in Paris, in 1900) seven more of his novels were found and sent to press—and these were filled with sentimental appreciations for everyday Portuguese life. What they teach us is that Eça de Queirós loved Portugal. Indeed, it's this kind of love that sets all the most moving satires apart. *The Rules of the Game*, *The Corrections*, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, *The Maias*—these works manage the difficult task of keeping in balance two contradictory emotions: love for their subjects' virtues and intolerance of their faults.

"There's nothing genuine in this wretched country now," balding Ega complains to Carlos, "not even the bread that we eat!"

In response, Carlos points to the upper hills of Lisbon, where the churches, the convents and the crumbling mansions cling to slopes burned dry by the radiant sun. "There's still that," he says. Eça de Queirós's answer lies in the background, in his portrait of two middle-aged men who have squandered the best opportunities of their country but who have sustained a perfect friendship, never once marred by pettiness, betrayal or rivalry. In them, the flame of hope refuses to die. ■

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Nineteenth-century engraving of a will reading, by John Burnet

Triumph of the Wills

by DANIEL BROOK

I have a little prank that I occasionally play on my 5-year-old nephew. I imagine an outlandish story and tell it to him in a perfect deadpan tone. Then I watch as his face goes from expressing trust to suspicion and incredulity, until finally breaking out in laughter at the absurdity of my tall tale. Recently I told him a story about how his little brother, whom he remembers coming home from the hospital two years ago, actually hatched out of an enormous egg his parents kept in their living room. "Remember how your mommy and daddy each took turns sitting on it?" I asked him as I struggled to keep a straight face. Before long, the idea of his baby brother pecking his way into the world had him in stitches.

After reading *A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World*, I finally understand what listening to these stories must be like for my nephew. Gregory Clark lays out in a deadpan tone, complete with charts and graphs, a theory as farfetched as my wildest avuncular yarns. Clark writes with the sober authority of an economics professor (he chairs the department at the University of California, Davis), but the more one reads of his theory of the Industrial Revolution, the less possible it becomes to see it as anything other than preposterous. Clark tries to explain why England, of all the world's nations, industrialized first. And his answer is this: certain reproduction patterns among medieval Britons allowed England to breed a hardworking population with bourgeois values. The issue of whether or not they hatched from enormous eggs is left unaddressed. But if it had been, one can be sure Clark would have included a graph showing that shell strength is directly related to offspring survival rates.

Clark's argument hinges on extensive archival research on the wills of medieval Englishmen. Over the course of twenty years of research in dusty archives, Clark compiled data from more than 2,000 wills. He chose a time period (1585–1638) and regions (London, East Anglia, Bristol and Darlington) that provided the most comprehensive data possible. He then cross-referenced the information from the wills against parish registers compiled by the International Genealogical Index of the Mormon Church.

Clark concluded from his research that "economic success translated powerfully into reproductive success, with the richest individuals having more than twice the number of surviving children at death as the poorest." As a result of this phenomenon, which Clark dubs "survival of the richest," most of Britain's population was descended from rich people after several generations. Not all the descendants of the rich were rich themselves: the medieval economy couldn't provide all the talented sons of the rich with equivalent forms of employment; thus, there was constant downward social mobility. But after several generations, most of Britain's population—rich and poor—was descended from the rich. And from these wealthy ancestors, Clark argues, nearly all Britons inherited the virtuous qualities that make people rich, like the ability to delay gratification ("low time preference rates," in econ-speak). As he writes, "The attributes that would ensure later economic dynamism—patience, hard work, ingenuity, innovativeness, education—were thus spreading biologically throughout the population."

For Clark, it is in the nature of settled agrarian societies to provide financial rewards to those with middle-class values. And being wealthy in a preindustrial society allows a man to support more children. The same phenomenon can be found in other settled agrarian societies, Clark

A Farewell to Alms
A Brief Economic History of the World.
By Gregory Clark.
Princeton. 420 pp. $29.95.

Daniel Brook's first book, The Trap: Selling Out to Stay Afloat in Winner-Take-All America, *was published earlier this year by Times Books.*

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writes, such as China and Japan; but in England, the most stable of all agrarian societies, the link between reproductive patterns and economic success was the most pronounced. While Clark is certain that the transmission of bourgeois virtues is "biological," he hedges a bit about whether this inheritance is genetic or just cultural, usually putting a modifier like "perhaps" or "even" in front of his eugenic speculations.

Oddly, Clark never explains just how such traits are transmitted from one generation to the next. His lack of interest in the mechanisms of heredity is strange, considering his own data show that the children of the wealthy often experienced downward mobility, which calls into question—if, like Clark, one is wedded to the idea that bourgeois values are the key to wealth—whether parents' values filtered down at all. For Clark it's self-evident that breeding patterns explain why certain places industrialized, as well as why others did not. Places that never developed agriculture or places where the poor simply outreproduced the rich never developed middle-class values or a middle-class work ethic. As a result, they exhibit what Clark terms a "socially induced lethargy," one that handicaps their economies to this day.

For a social Darwinist, the most ossified societies are also the most economically advanced.

Clark attempts to defend this assertion with data measuring the slothfulness of Third World workers. He approvingly quotes an imperial-era textile expert from Britain who wrote in 1930, "Labour in India is undoubtedly on a very low par, probably it comes next to Chinese labour in inefficiency, wastefulness, and lack of discipline." As one of Clark's charts documents, in 1921 the average American mill worker could tend more than 700 spindles per hour, while the average Indian worker could tend just 118. That Indian textile workers weren't giving their all for white managers in Raj-era mills genuinely seems to puzzle Clark. Why couldn't sturdy British managers whip the natives into shape? After all, in Clark's view the British Empire was a free-market paradise, not a shell game in which the rules changed from protectionism to laissez-faire based on the economic needs of the colonizer. And Clark does not even attempt to address the paradox of Spain, which, though it never developed a Protestant work ethic—workers there have national nap time every afternoon—remains wealthier than every one of its former colonies.

For Clark, a scholar who puts the very term political economy in scare quotes, the modern world of global capitalism functions in much the same exploitation-free way as the age of empire. By his lights, the low wages in today's developing countries have nothing to do with the race to the bottom that creates "export processing zones"—regions where taxes don't apply, and labor and environmental laws are lax—or even the overpopulation that has created a ruthlessly cutthroat labor market in some Third World countries. Rather, low wages are solely the result of low productivity innate to a specific population. Clark writes (without citation) that textile workers in modern India work only about fifteen minutes out of every hour they're at the plant. That's why they're paid only 38 cents an hour. The question of uneven development has been solved, and it comes down to this: maquiladora slackers!

While Clark's theory is outlandish, his question is an important one: why are some places so rich and others so poor? Thinkers have been struggling with this question—perhaps the ultimate economic question—since the Industrial Revolution dawned in England around 1800 and a handful of societies began to pull away from the rest. And despite numerous brilliant attempts at explaining it—from Karl Marx's technocentric theory to Max Weber's culture-based hypothesis—it remains a question worth wrestling with to this day.

In his account of the relationship between literacy and economic growth, a relationship considered to be central to explanations of industrialization, Clark dismisses both the Marxist idea that the technological advance of the printing press was crucial to the spread of literacy and the Weberian insight that converting from a religion where the laity was forbidden to read the Bible on their own (medieval Catholicism) to one where they were encouraged to do so (Protestantism) increased literacy rates in Britain. For Clark, the rise of literacy is explained by the reproduction of a population that was better at reading. Similarly, Clark dismisses the structural arguments of both Jared Diamond, who in *Guns, Germs, and Steel* attributes the West's dominance to geographical good fortune, and Kenneth Pomeranz, who explains in *The Great Divergence* that Britain's resources—some naturally occurring, such as coal, and some pilfered, like the North American colonies themselves—were the keys to industrialization. Clark has little patience for those who suggest that democracy, which renders kleptocratic rule untenable, matters much at all. And the Adam Smith disciples at the International Monetary Fund and World Bank fare even worse. To Clark, the incentives of Smith's "invisible hand" work only for peoples who have already had the bourgeois virtues bred into them.

The most important question raised by *A Farewell to Alms* is not raised by Clark himself, however, but by the publication of his book. In the late nineteenth century, America's best-known social Darwinist, William Graham Sumner, a professor of political and social science at Yale, wrote, "Let every man be sober, industrious, prudent, and wise, and bring up his children to be so likewise and poverty will be abolished in a few generations." For Clark, this is exactly what came to pass in England. Clark eschews the term "social Darwinism," but it's an apt description of his thesis. The question raised by the publication of his book, then, is: why is social Darwinism back in vogue?

Social Darwinism is the ideology of Gilded Ages, times of stunning inequality and declining social mobility. Social Darwinism takes the manifest injustice of a socially ossified society and argues that its very ossification proves that such a society is just. You can see it in David Brooks's *New York Times* column when he reassures a nation in which predatory lending now serves the function once played by sharecropping that the "rich don't exploit the poor; they just outcompete them." You can also see it in *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. For Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein, survival of the fittest proves that rich Americans deserve their wealth and poor Americans deserve their poverty. Clark merely applies the theory globally to rich countries and poor countries.

To the social Darwinist, it is societies with high degrees of intergenerational social mobility that are, in fact, the most backward. They have yet to allow all the talented to rise to the top. By contrast, the most ossified societies are the most advanced, for they have already allowed the

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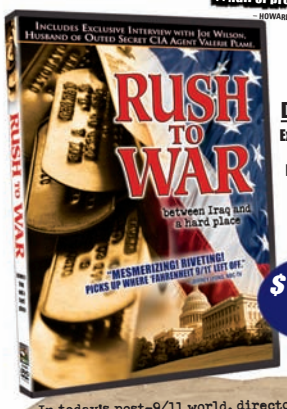

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best to ascend, where they continue to reproduce superior offspring. Thus, the meritocratic filtering period was always in the past. Perhaps, as the first social Darwinists argued, it was at the dawn of human history? Or, as Clark argues, in the Middle Ages? Or, as Mickey Kaus suggested in his 1992 book, *The End of Equality*, just a generation ago? Whenever it was, it is not now. The wheat has already been separated from the chaff. A few were already riding high long ago, and the rest continue to be run over.

Despite his book's provocative thesis, Clark's recommendations are exceedingly modest. He suggests that the usual medicine the West ships to underdeveloped countries—humanitarian aid and neoliberal economic reforms—will not succeed, for none of it addresses the root cause of poverty: laziness. No array of policies will work on Third World peoples because the peoples simply won't work.

Clark is not wrong to claim that the West, often with the best of intentions, has contributed to overpopulation in the developing world. Western medicine, he argues, has lengthened life spans in poor countries without increasing their productive capacities, resulting in more, poorer people. Yet Clark is so wedded to the idea that productivity and productivity alone determines wages that he doesn't consider the role of supply and demand in the labor market. Much of the developing world has too many people competing for too few jobs. And when people are so plentiful and so inexpensive to employ, there is little incentive for a country to industrialize.

Traveling in India three years ago, I was struck by the fact that I never saw an industrially produced broom. To this day, a broom in India is a stick with straw tied to one end. This is not because India lacks the technology to mass-produce brooms in a factory; it is because there is no incentive to do so. For instance, when one can hire a maid for, say, a dollar a day, there's little reason to invest in a labor-saving device like a broom, let alone a vacuum cleaner. Conversely, when labor is scarce and relatively expensive, the demand for time-saving devices goes up. Such devices in turn increase productivity, leading to the virtuous cycle of development. Overpopulation in developing countries is likely a key reason this cycle doesn't get going.

The real danger of the argument put forth in *A Farewell to Alms* is its assumption that political passivity, in rich and poor countries alike, fosters economic growth. Clark sees development as a rising tide that lifts all boats, with the biggest benefits going to the least skilled workers. If "worker discipline," by which Clark means showing up on time (without children in tow) and working diligently through the day without breaking for snacks or cigarettes, is the key to development, workers should just buckle down and do as they're told. But to the extent that developed nations have been able to build fairer economies, it has been because workers didn't sit back and take it—they organized, in politics and in the workplace. When Clark mentions that in modern-day England "the lowest-paid [tenth of the population] still gets about 40 percent of the average wage," this is largely because Britain's minimum wage is about twice the US minimum wage. In the deregulated United States, the working poor are common; one in six Americans makes less than 35 percent of the average wage, compared with just one in twenty Brits. In Clark's world, even the wage gap closes if left to the market. Yet notice that when today's rising generation of American women decided feminism was for their mothers, the male/female wage gap, which had been closing for decades, stagnated. And notice too that when a generation of American workers decided unions were for Grandpa in the mine and Daddy in the factory, not themselves in the office, inequality swung back to Gilded Age levels.

In places with inequalities even starker than our nation's, many 5-year-olds have more serious things to worry about than prankster uncles. Touring the New Seemapuri slum on the outskirts of New Delhi with a social worker, I met such kids: 5-year-old day laborers who rooted through the city's trash for salvageable materials. The children sold scrap paper by the sack—sacks larger than the children themselves. The going rate for glass shards was 25 cents a kilo. At a makeshift school run by my guide, several children came late from their trash-picking work. (They must have had high time preference rates.)

Clearly, progress doesn't just happen through an increase in worker discipline; often it happens through a breakdown of it. Just last month, a group of New Delhi's ragpickers won protective boots, gloves and aprons from the state government. Now the union is pressuring the government to create a municipal sanitation force with benefits. Progress is possible, and it takes hard work—the hard work of organizing on the job and in politics, not just the hard work of tending 700 spindles per hour. ■

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Roscoe Mitchell's Wolf Tones

by BRIAN MORTON

A musician's "voice" is not simply a metaphor. No two creative instrumentalists ever sound quite alike. Even on the piano, the touch and attack of Ashkenazy are immediately distinguishable from those of Brendel or Gould. And so it is, right through the orchestra, even if it takes a certain refinement of perception to tell one oboe soloist from another.

The saxophone represents a special case. It is an instrument that, for reasons of design and history, almost entirely depends on the personality of the player. The peculiarities of its manufacture—the saxophone family is all conical-bored and overblows at the octave—and its emergence at a time when the basic language of the classical instrumentarium was well established, bequeathed it a curiously marginal status. Despite the enthusiasm of Hector Berlioz and occasional appearances in the nineteenth-century orchestra, the saxophone's apparent destiny was to play a down-market role in vernacular music: marching bands, pit orchestras, *bal musette* and, of course, jazz.

All instruments—Strads, Gazzelloni's titanium flute—have "wolf tones," places on the instrument where the specific design or that particular instrument's history requires the player to alter technique to keep it in pitch. The saxophone has nothing but. A basic scale played on a tenor saxophone has less character than those same notes written on a stave, and yet most jazz fans will identify the great saxophonists from the shortest phrase or measure. Their voices are as distinctive as the whorls and loops of a fingerprint, or the particular cadence and timbre of a speaking voice.

Who would not immediately recognize Johnny Hodges, that high, erotic wail that rose out of Duke Ellington's ensembles; or Sonny Rollins's muscular street orator's discourse; or Lester Young's wounded grace; or John Coltrane's hard-toned intensity? The list goes on: Sidney Bechet, Coleman Hawkins, Chu Berry, Warne Marsh and Lee Konitz, Paul Desmond, Ornette Coleman, Steve Lacy, Anthony Braxton, Evan Parker, Jan Garbarek—all of them possessed of a rich idiolect. If Charlie Parker had lost his passport, and he was erratic enough to do just that, a single tone on his horn would have been enough to get him past immigration.

Among saxophonists, Roscoe Mitchell is an anomaly. Although he is one of the most innovative and important of the current senior generation, few could describe with any confidence what is distinctive about Mitchell's "voice" or reliably recognize it in any of its multifarious contexts. Of course, that may be part of the problem. Mitchell's dogged commitment to experiment has led him into projects far removed from the conventional jazz combo. Or it may be that, since he has spent a large proportion of his career as part of the most successful "avant-garde" jazz group of modern times, the Art Ensemble of Chicago (AEC), we hear him only as part of an ensemble voice. Or it may be that because of Mitchell's dedication to multi-instrumentalism, playing a full range of horns from the soprano to the bass saxophones, as well as flutes and noncanonical instruments, we are liable to be misled by an unfamiliar tonality or sound color. Yet Anthony Braxton, another multi-instrumentalist with a very similar background and philosophy, always sounds like himself whether playing alto saxophone, the unfeasibly large contrabass or, indeed, any of the more exotic varieties in between.

The enigma is relatively easily resolved. Mitchell's roots in jazz are deep, but he is also profoundly versed in European art music, and particularly the atonal music of the early twentieth century. In fact, his interests in music seem to have no boundaries. Though he has worked in free improvisation—hewing to no predetermined parameters and often playing "little instruments" of ad hoc design—and though his recorded and public work frequently alludes to the blues, field hollers, folk narratives and even standard thirty-two-bar song structure, his real interest lies in a little-understood nexus of two apparently contradictory approaches to music. If anything can be read into the trajectory of a recording career, it's no accident that Mitchell's first record, released in 1966 on Delmark, is called *Sound* and that his latest, a return to the European ECM label, is *Composition/Improvisation Nos. 1, 2, & 3.*

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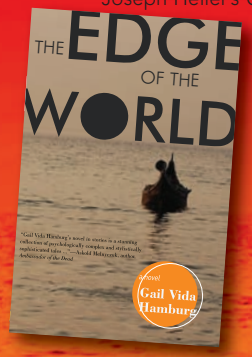

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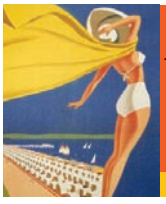
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We are not properly prepared to detect his "voice" if we listen for it only in the overtones of his saxophones. To hear Mitchell, it's necessary to understand that his work is premised on improvisation as a form of composition and that the usual sharp distinction between the two processes has been suspended. His goal is to be a "supermusician" to whom matters of style, form, instrumentality, even personality have become irrelevant.

Roscoe Mitchell was born in Chicago in the summer of 1940. He first took up the clarinet at the age of 12. While serving in the Army in Germany, he studied with the first clarinet of the Heidelberg Symphony and played in a band with tenor saxophonist Albert Ayler. Returning to Chicago in 1961, Mitchell found himself in a scene in which the old communitarian spirit had begun to acquire a new political edge, sharpened on one side by the civil rights movement, on the other by the simple contingency of making a living in a club scene where rule changes had made larger group performance commercially unviable.

Mitchell was soon in contact with pianist and composer Muhal Richard Abrams, a powerful catalyst on the Chicago scene. He had been playing bebop with a group from Wilson College that included Braxton, fellow saxophonist Henry Threadgill, bassist Malachi Favors and saxophonist Joseph Jarman (the latter two being future AEC members). From Abrams he got invaluable encouragement, not least to write as much and in as many varied styles as possible. He began to work with the pianist's rehearsal group, the Experimental Band. Mitchell took from the experience an understanding that the production of sound was, in Western music, reserved for an extremely hierarchical group of objects—pianos, violins, trumpets, kettle drums—when in fact sound, and therefore music, could be produced by almost any means. Also, the experience of playing in what was essentially a workshop allowed Mitchell to reconsider the relationship between music-making in pure form and public performance. The absence of an audience made crowd-pleasing histrionics meaningless. It also made silence less uncomfortable. These were ideas that had recently been explored by alto saxophonist Ornette Coleman, a Texan maverick whose own struggle to be heard had led him to explore the use of silence.

The opening track of Mitchell's first recording was a tribute to "Ornette." The music presented on *Sound* was very different from that of the New York avant-garde, whose signature features were intensity of expression and individualistic soloing. By contrast, *Sound* seemed to arise from a collective philosophy, alternating periods of dynamic playing with relative silence, incorporating sonorities not usually associated with modern or avant-garde jazz—cello, harmonica, recorder—as well as all the informal instruments and toys deployed by group members.

By the time *Sound* was released, Mitchell was a member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), a nonprofit body founded by Abrams with pianist Jodie Christian, drummer Steve McCall and composer Phil Cohran. At a time when there was severe economic pressure on players, it made surprisingly little difference how unorthodox their work was: little work either way, beyond what was happening under Abrams's experimental umbrella.

The Mitchell sextet, which was the first AACM group to make a record, evolved into the Roscoe Mitchell Art Ensemble and subsequently into the Art Ensemble, with a personnel including trumpeter Lester Bowie and Malachi Favors on bass. Other sextet players moved on. Joseph Jarman joined as a second saxophonist. Percussionist Alvin Fiedler was briefly replaced by Phillip Wilson, but it was as a drummerless quartet that the group left the United States for France in 1969.

The Art Ensemble of Chicago—the location was added to give the group a more specific identity in Europe—was an immediate success there. Perversely, it was easier in Europe to assert the African origins of jazz, in the sense of privileging rhythm rather than harmony or even melody, and in restoring a concept of music as social ritual. Though Mitchell (and Bowie) seemed to stand somewhat apart from the group's more theatrical dimension—appearing onstage in colorful costumes and face paint—the AEC's stage show was in its way as definitive as that of the Sun Ra Arkestra, and similarly deceptive. It was a clever stratagem, with obvious audience appeal, but ironically it also allowed the musicians to develop their advanced compositional ideas more privately—behind the masks, as it were. At first the four members played small percussion, thereby creating rhythmic backgrounds for the group that were very different from the heavy, regular counts provided by a swing or bebop drummer. But it was in France that the group met Don Moye (later Famoudou), who joined as percussionist, thus completing the familiar AEC lineup.

All the while, individual members continued to pursue creative paths beyond the AEC. Jarman made two records for the

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Chicago-based Delmark label, which had released *Sound* and later put out Mitchell records such as *Hey Donald* and *Sound Songs* (both 1994). Bowie began his solo recording career at the same time as Mitchell, with *Numbers 1 & 2* on Nessa. This was the imprint that in 1977, six years after the AEC's return from Europe, released Mitchell's classic *Nonaah*, a series of performances with group members and others, also duos and saxophone solos similar to those on the earlier *Solo Saxophone Concerts* (Sackville, 1974). Here one finds Mitchell exploring extremes of tonality and timbre, playing soprano, alto, tenor and bass saxophones on the earlier disc, and on the later one in an ensemble setting that includes Anthony Braxton on the impossibly pitched sopranino. At other times in his recording career, Mitchell has also played baritone saxophone and the now rarely used C-melody saxophone, an attempt to provide a horn in concert pitch rather than the more familiar E flat and B flat of the saxophone family.

How securely Mitchell can be defined as an avant-garde artist is open to question. To be sure, the music on the solo saxophone concerts is radical and stripped down—Braxton is mistakenly given sole credit for pioneering this area of inquiry with his 1968 *For Alto*—but the non-AEC Mitchell discography is far more varied and tuneful than the shorthand version might suggest. Alongside the more abstract-sounding sets—*Four Compositions*, *Two Improvisations*, *Solo x 3*, *Sound and Space Ensembles*—it includes such delights as *Snurdy McGurdy and Her Dancin' Shoes*, which neither threaten nor deliver music of a fearsome sort; in fact, no fewer than five Mitchell records include "song" or "dance" in their titles, while his ECM solo debut in 1999 was *Nine to Get Ready!*

The blue-chip European label was as logical a destination for a composer of Mitchell's Modernist tendencies as Delmark, Sackville and Nessa had been for a player of his deeply rooted traditionalism. For a large part of his career, he has been dependent on transatlantic imprints, particularly the Italian Black Saint, to put out his work. Returning to the United States in 1971, the AEC found itself in an environment where jazz had been largely eclipsed by pop and rock, and where the political tremors of the late '60s had led to a substantial backlash against black militancy and nationalism. Again, Mitchell's and his colleagues' reaction was neither quietist nor compromised, but neither was it a wholesale involvement with the political scene. In 1974 Mitchell moved to East Lansing, Michigan, where he also formed the significantly named Creative Arts Collective and an associated group called the Sound Ensemble. These were further steps on Mitchell's long journey toward composition based directly on the spontaneity of improvised music.

The 1980s were divided between AEC duties and recordings for Black Saint, which saw Mitchell working a sometimes precarious line between advanced composition techniques and vernacular forms, a divide in his work that sometimes blurred and confused his public profile. Working in Michigan had made available to him the resources of Michigan State University and particularly the music and performance schools. Mitchell made contact with new-music composer-performers like accordionist Pauline Oliveros, pioneer of Deep Listening, and the vocalist Thomas Buckner. Oliveros's use of an essentially vernacular instrument to develop avant-garde ideas intrigued Mitchell, as did Buckner's confident appropriation of a huge range of singing styles, canonical and noncanonical. Those lessons are beautifully expressed in the 1999 Delmark album *In Walked Buckner*, dedicated to but not actually featuring the singer.

Mitchell and Buckner had, by this time, worked together very fruitfully as Space, in which they were joined by multi-instrumentalist Gerald Oshita, who used such unlikely horns as the Conn-o-sax and the contrabass sarrusophone. For a musician as interested in the placement of note choices as Mitchell was and is, the ability to work in proximity to such extremes of pitch and with Buckner's unconventional sounds was extremely liberating. A still later group was called Note Factory, a clear indication that for all the rhythmic democracy of the AEC, Mitchell was increasingly thinking in terms of pitches and scales, adapting the fast scalar improvisation that is so fitting for the saxophone to more elaborate constructions. Typically, though, he has tried to avoid imprisoning himself in vertical harmony or in any approach that requires a strictly hierarchical understanding of pitches. As recently as 2004, on the Mutable disc *Solo 3*, he released improv/compositions that make use of a "percussion cage" that combines "found" and real percussion instruments (and maybe name checks John Cage as well).

The only area of contemporary music Mitchell did not seem to have explored was the field of electronics. In that, he resembled the somewhat younger English saxophonist Evan Parker, whose solo saxophone explorations (mostly on soprano) were increasingly devoted to finding overtone series and fields of great mathematical precision and expressive intensity. Fifteen years ago,

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though, Parker began to explore electro-acoustic approaches, partly through a brief collaboration with Danish trio Ghost-in-the-Machine and subsequently through his own Electro-Acoustic Ensemble, which has now released four records with ECM.

In the autumn of 2004, Parker and Mitchell came together in a concert hall in Munich to record a grouping that involved members of the Englishman's ensemble—including bassist Barry Guy and violinist Philipp Wachsmann—and members of Note Factory and others, under the ad hoc title The Transatlantic Ensemble. The immediate feel of *Composition/Improvisation Nos. 1, 2, & 3* is very much of a classical group, with strings, tymps and piano, generating a sound-world that makes one think first of European art music. Indeed, there is little about the long-ish opening track that would lead one to feel that improvisation plays any substantial part in this performance or that jazz is in any way part of its genetic make-up. Intriguingly, the first inkling that this is not the case comes toward the end of the short second section, when percussionists Tani Tabbal and Paul Lytton engage in the first of several instrumental dialogues that punctuate this remarkable record.

Mitchell plays soprano saxophone throughout, while Parker deploys his tenor, yet what defines this music most clearly as the American's is not the sound of his horn but something about the way the music organizes itself into periods of intense activity bracketed by silence, duos breaking out of the ensemble in a spirit that veers between conversation and contention and in contexts that are alternately ordered and chaotic, or seemingly so. The sequence of "movements," nine in all, and the title reference to three parts don't quite seem to square unless one checks the sleeve frequently. That is why the title is not given as *Composition & Improvisation* (as if a set of themes and variations) but with a slash that more or less suspends any fundamental distinction between the two. As with much of Mitchell's work, the delivery is mostly rather quiet and unemphatic, with a tendency to dwell not just on exact pitchings but also on the precise tone color of particular sounds. Pianist Craig Taborn's role is fascinating. At some moments, he seems to be articulating some approximate tonal center for the music, some gravitational point of reference that never quite manages to resist the centrifugal energy of the strings and horns; at others, he is the archetypal pianist-as-percussionist, banging out sharp attacks that are more reminiscent of Cecil Taylor's famous "eighty-eight tuned drums" definition than most of the work lazily and misleadingly attributed to Taylor's influence.

The long movement "III" moves into something like "free jazz," but while there is considerable exhilaration in the playing, this is arguably the least typical and least successful aspect of the performance. After some more short sequences, there are two extended movements ("VII/VIII") in which the integration of elements seems more complete though not subject to any discernible logic or determination. The coda is deliciously ambiguous. Far from reaching a climax, the sequence dissolves into a shimmer, as if some tiny subset of the whole cosmological process has gone into reverse, solids turning to gas, orbits no longer regular or fixed, location and velocity uncertain. Nothing in the whole canon of twentieth-century Western art music conveys so much satisfying mystery.

Like most exploratory artists, Mitchell prefers the forward glance to the retrospective and fears repeating himself. But even in this most formally conceived of performances, he has managed to bring together elements that have been part of his work from the beginning: pure sound, sound that obeys or resists hierarchical organization, rhythm as fundamental rather than embellishment, improvisation not as a gone-in-the-air end in itself but as an inseparable element of the composition process, composition as a dynamic rather than an ossifying procedure, passion, cerebral abstraction, a sense that musical "meaning" is always subject to slippage. Multi-instrumentalism has only enlarged and enhanced his playing personality rather than obscured it; at base, Mitchell's only "instrument" is sound itself. Over the years, he has followed a doggedly individual track, whether within the joyous exuberance and discipline of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, out on his own as a solo saxophonist on an instrument only ever meant to play low accompaniments, as a song-based bandleader, as a "classical" composer, whether playing sounds as dry and delicate as those he conjures from his percussion cage or hollering a rap on "You Wastin' My Time."

These are the qualities that make him Roscoe Mitchell, but still indefinable. One sympathizes with anyone charged with pinning down in a few words what he sounds like, which is why more than a few reference books and critical articles fall back on quick formulations like "multi-instrumentalist" or "avant-garde" or "AACM musician" or even "member of the Art Ensemble of Chicago." His "voice" can't be detected in a single saxophone phrase or timbre, but that is not to say it can't be found. It is present and utterly distinctive in everything he has done over four decades. ■

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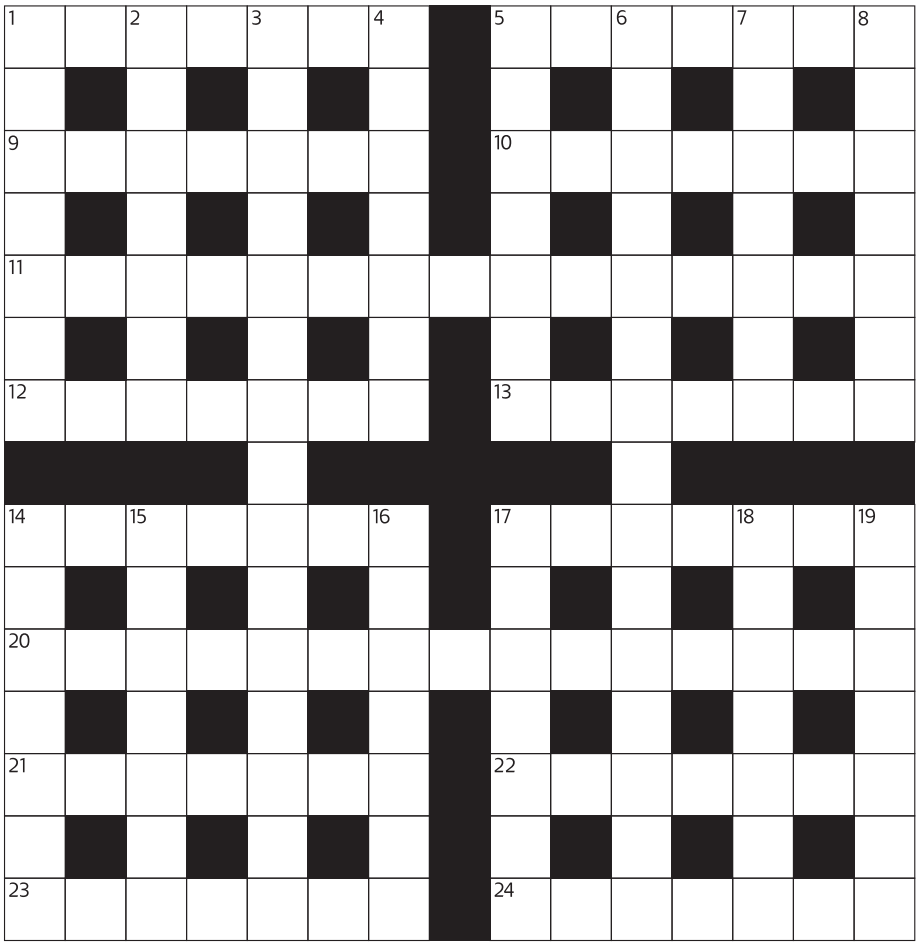

ACROSS

1 Perhaps keys and places to store things. (7)

5 Bad, bad read, especially when worn out. (7)

9 Each sort gets to write what might be a way to make this less dear. (7)

10 Is some place to sleep very bad? Confound this! (7)

11 How those who elope behave if they don't have a proper wedding. (15)

12 One who might play in the band is named incorrectly. (7)

13 Sum up around this place, but get stuck! (7)

14 Inched a way out of being held prisoner. (Mail once was.) (7)

17 Art material with a sad utterance half licked. (7)

20 They give freely when a place in Pennsylvania starts to go sort of north, with a confused type, on little streets. (15)

21 Religious givers might be, but it comes back to an unnamed object. (7)

22 Circle back to tumbling sun and roll out. (7)

23 Gaps found in a USA clan. (7)

24 Torn up side streets, in short, and stops here. (7)

DOWN

1 Institutions of education are sort of clumsy about one point! (7)

2 Pushed into action by a schoolgirl, with the end of force found inside. (7)

3 It deals with something called noble at times, such as the 18th Amendment. (15)

4 One supposedly tiptoes in each night, you tell the kids. (7)

5 Country where the outlawing is *inter alia*. (7)

6 Wire the sex maniacs—they are only trying to help you! (15)

7 I'd come up with something on my cap by which a number is chopped into pieces. (7)

8 What a hen does indeed is stopped for a while. (7)

14 What goes on your head has it, not quite all with financial backing. (7)

15 Like first-class upbringing, but with a shaky finish from a faraway continent. (7)

16 Acts like it gets around the sales sticker, but we may find some older people behave this way in them. (7)

17 Little silver circle—but if you run it, you're stuck! (7)

18 What we have at school, with not so much on the point of it. (7)

19 Makes a strategic move on board, with the players having the French ending. (7)

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